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2 You can send one entry for each member of your family, but only one entry per person. (Members of our staff and their families are not eligible.)

3 The winning entry will be the one which comes closest to listing the stories in this issue in the order of their popularity. This order of popularity will be determined by the votes of a selected cross-section of readers. In case of a tie, the entry with the earliest postmark will win. The judges will be the editors of EQMM, and their decision will be final. No entries can be returned.

4 Fill in your name and address and mail your entry to $2,000 Prize Popularity Contest, EQMM, 471 Park Avenue, New York 22, N. Y. All entries must be postmarked not later than February 24, 1956. The prizes will be mailed by March 30, and the winner of the $1,000 First Prize will be announced in the June issue of EQMM, on sale early in May.

$2,000 Prize Popularity Contest
ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE
471 Park Avenue, New York 22, N. Y.

Here is my selection of the six most popular stories in this February 1956 issue of ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE:

(Use the numbers as they appear on table of contents.)

*First*_____
*Second*_____
*Third*_____
*Fourth*_____
*Fifth*_____
*Sixth*_____

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ADDRESS_____

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

including **BLACK MASK MAGAZINE**

STORY POPULARITY CONTEST

$1,000 FIRST PRIZE 1000 OTHER PRIZES

1.	THE LETTER	*Thomas Kyd*	3
2.	FIND THE COOK	*Agatha Christie*	12
3.	JOHNNY CINDERELLA	*Joseph Petracca*	23
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The best of the new and the best of the old

PUBLISHER: *Joseph W. Ferman* EDITOR: *Ellery Queen*

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PRIZE-WINNING STORY

Thomas Kyd's prize-winning story takes the form of a Letter to the Editors. The writer of the letter — a retired police officer — asks Ellery Queen a question. We know our answer, but we ask you to make believe the letter is addressed to you — to each and every one of you who reads this story. What would your answer be? This is not, we hasten to explain, a mere riddle story. The question involved is a much deeper one than "who did it." It is the big question of our time — the question that has been facing you as an individual, as a part of your community, your country, and of our whole civilization . . . You will enjoy this story on more than one level: it will entertain you and it will make you ponder the dilemma of our day.

I. THE LETTER

by THOMAS KYD

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine
471 Park Avenue
New York 22, New York

DEAR MR. QUEEN:

This is a queer kind of letter and maybe you'll say he's just another crackpot. Or maybe you'll say, why me? Why take the matter up with Ellery Queen, instead of a priest or one of those psychoanalysts? Well, that will be up to you.

I'm a retired police officer. I worked my way up in Homicide for thirty years. When I was cleaning my desk out six months ago, the men started strolling in, mostly old-timers but even some youngsters just promoted from a beat — a lot of them off-duty that should have been home in bed. They just stood around kind of embarrassed and I didn't even see who slipped it on the desk. The best set of fishing tackle money could buy. A little plate on the rod said *From the Boys in the Division to a Good Cop.* It's not poetry, but it looked like poetry to me, and I want to say right off that it's true — I mean about what kind of police officer I was. It's nothing crooked I have to tell about, nothing I'm ashamed of — not by a long shot. That's what makes this thing so damn unfair.

Life ought to look good to me. I'm not feeble, and with my pension I've got enough to get by. I'm back in the pine country I grew up in, and they tell me the fishing is as good as ever — maybe even better. I wouldn't know.

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I haven't wet a line yet. I haven't done the things I was planning to do, or much of anything except think about Jones. Right there's the funny thing. He's been dead for twenty-five years and I hadn't thought about him for a long time, except maybe a little now and then. When I was still in harness I hardly thought about him at all. Now I hardly think about anything else.

I'm calling him Jones. It was just after they started letting me handle small stuff alone. This Jones phoned about his wife — suicide — and I got there with the Division surgeon about 12 o'clock on a Saturday night. It was a medium kind of house in the suburbs and Jones was a medium kind of fellow, about thirty-five and not bad-looking. He acted all right, kind of tense and so on, but not putting on a show. He said he had been working hard around the place all day and had gone to bed early. He was cashier in the local branch of a downtown bank and people in banks didn't work Saturdays even back then. He said he found her when he went down to see why she hadn't come to bed.

All the surgeon did was poke a finger in her cheek. She was cold when we looked at her, bent over a desk in the living room as if she had fallen asleep. Not pretty but kind of nice looking — kind of mild, you might say. Maybe that's not important but I mention it because it could have had something to do with what happened between Jones and me. There was a glass and ginger ale bottle on the desk, and a little bottle of tablets. I guess it's not the right thing to mention what they were, but hell, anybody over thirty knows what they were. The stuff used to be used for feminine hygiene, but if you swallowed it you died and died quick. More than one damn fool has reached into a medicine closet in the dark to get some aspirins for a headache, and cured his headache but good.

The material evidence in this case don't amount to anything and I'll dispose of it quick. Next day the bottle of tablets showed her prints and his and the local druggist's, just like you would expect, and the autopsy showed she had taken plenty. That's all — except for the letter.

I found the letter after the surgeon left and before the van got there, when I was having a look around. Like any officer would do, I sent Jones into another room and closed the door. He had said right off he had known enough not to move the body or anything. The letter was on the desk, hidden because of the way she was bent over, and it was to her father. You'll soon see why I can't quote it, but I can tell what was in it all right. There was a little religious stuff, and a hope that she would be forgiven and her husband too. Of course I wondered about that — I mean about why her husband needed to be forgiven — and I wondered why there was no letter for him. One more thing. She said she couldn't go through what her mother had gone through. It was signed.

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I got some samples of her handwriting when I went through the desk, and I might as well tell right off that the letter was bona fide. I knew enough about handwriting for that, and I had the stuff under a glass later that same night.

I called in Jones. More by accident than anything else I had shoved the letter and handwriting samples inside my coat pocket, and when he came in I got my first real whiff of rat. His eyes went to my hands. It was just a flicker. If it had been more, I wouldn't have thought anything of it. Why *shouldn't* he look to see if I had found a letter? But just that little flicker. He *knew* there was a letter. He had been too damn scrupulous about not touching the body anyway — his own wife, mind you. At least that's how it figured to me.

I didn't say anything about the letter. I just asked what he could give me on his wife. He said he had killed her. Not the tablets — he said he didn't mean the tablets, he didn't blame himself for them. He had got them at the drug store a couple weeks before, because she had run out and had asked him to get them. That wasn't it. It was a woman, another woman. Then he started to cry. He said he knew his wife loved him, loved her home, but this other was the real thing and he hadn't been able to stop himself. He had told his wife they were through. He said he should have known what it would do to her, because her mother had gone through the same thing.

There it was, neat as a pin. It fitted with what was in her letter and with why there was none to him. I asked him when he had told his wife about this other woman. He said a week ago. I asked him how she had acted, whether she had told any of her friends. He said she wasn't one to talk much, and besides she hadn't seen any friends. He was still crying. He said she hadn't been out since he told her, had just stayed at home in a kind of daze.

So that's what I came away with. Nothing. Nothing, that is, except a hunch about the flicker of his eyes toward my empty hands. That, and maybe his saying he had killed her. When they say that to a policeman, they don't really mean it. It's a denial — if you see what I mean — and what the hell, nobody had accused him. And his slipping in that bit about him being the one that bought the tablets. It was a hunch, or maybe it was just stubbornness, but I left without mentioning the letter.

I slept on it, and early Sunday morning I went to see her father. He was living in a home — not a charity home but the other kind — and he was pretty old. It was me that told him about his daughter's death. It's one of the things police officers have to do. When I got around to it, I put my question this way — I told him his son-in-law had found another woman, and I asked what his daughter would have meant if she had been heard to say she couldn't go through

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what her mother had gone through. He was an old pale man, but the blood came creeping up his neck and he glared at me. When I asked him outright if there had been any trouble like that for her mother, he didn't stall. He said yes, he and her mother had been separated a year, and that was the reason, but it was nonsense. It had happened twenty-five years before, when the girl was only a kid in school. There had been a reconciliation and years more of happy married life. His daughter hadn't been touched — she too had had a happy life. His hands were shaking and the red in his face made his eyes shine.

Well, I believed him. Then I asked him what his daughter might have meant. He said if his daughter said anything like that, she meant an incurable disease. Her mother had been two years dying.

I went back to Jones. Yes, he said, his wife had worried about herself some, but there was nothing. Only the week before she had been checked up at a clinic — one of the first of those prevention things — and the x-rays and tests had all been negative. He showed me the report that had come that same Saturday morning, and there it was in black and white.

I got the break when I was walking away from the house. The Jones place had a fair piece of ground and just one property adjacent. A woman was working on a border of flowers by some shrubbery and if she hadn't been there I wouldn't have thought of neighbors at all because, like I say, there was a fair piece of ground on that side too. Jones had said his wife hadn't seen any friends during the week she knew about him and the other woman, and he wouldn't have lied on that — not on anything so easy to check. A neighbor was different. I hadn't thought of it in a section where neighbors were so scarce, so maybe he hadn't either. I stopped to talk. She knew about the suicide. God knows how those things spread — the birds must do it. Yes, she had seen Mrs. Jones. That's why it was such a shock. She had seemed so normal, planning a new border of annuals. When was this? About Wednesday. *Wednesday.*

Had she seen Mrs. Jones since? Not to talk to, but she had got a glimpse of her about 11 o'clock yesterday morning. She remembered because it was just after Mr. Jones had been out to take the mail from the carrier. Just a glimpse as Mrs. Jones stepped out on the back lawn for a minute, as if she had to get out to breathe. Did she look different from on Wednesday? That was just it, she looked as if she had seen a ghost.

I made one more call — the only one there was to make. I had got her address from Jones as a matter of routine. She was a good-looker all right, and could have given the wife maybe six or eight years; but the other looked better to me — I mean, would have before she swallowed those tablets. But that's neither here nor there. I don't know if Jones had phoned her or not but it wouldn't

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have made any difference. Lots of women are kind of liars and a woman in a position like hers will say anything to put herself in a better light. You've got to expect it.

When she stopped blubbering, she said that she and Jones were just good friends — nothing improper between them. She and Jones were the greatest soul mates since Antony and Cleopatra. They hadn't made any plans at all, except to sacrifice their happiness for the sake of Mrs. Jones. They were going to get married eventually because a woman of her high character couldn't accept anything less. That wasn't the reason for the suicide because Mrs. Jones didn't know yet that her husband wanted a divorce. Mrs. Jones had known for months and was only too glad to get rid of a man she never really loved. As I say, you got to expect a bunch of lies and contradictions in a case like this, but I came away disgusted.

It wasn't my Sunday on duty, and I just sat home and thought. The more I thought the more I came to a slow boil, and I'll tell you why. Because I knew what had happened and I knew I couldn't do a thing about it. That skunk was in the clear.

Now I'll tell you why I knew what had happened, why it came to me. That same spring a boy and girl in high school had got themselves in trouble — kids from very decent families. When they knew for sure, they got hold of a revolver. She used it on herself, but he lost his nerve at the last minute. It's the kind of thing that happens, and it always gets a big play in the papers. If anyone says it was just that story that put the notion of a suicide pact in my head, okay; but it's what could have put it in Jones's head too.

And now I'll tell you what I figured happened. Jones had this other woman but no safe way to get rid of his wife. He was cashier of a bank, and they aren't supposed just to walk out on things. He hadn't said a word to her in spite of what he told me. She was still peaceful and making plans for her garden that week, like the neighbor had said. Jones used her fear of an incurable disease. When the report from the clinic came, he lied to her about what was in it or had one ready-faked, saying she was in the same spot as her mother. It would have been easy for him to put the lid on it, to put himself in a spot too. He could have shown her a notification of bank examination, and lied that they would discover he was an embezzler, lied too that he was in the stock market up to his ears. That's only a guess, but it would have been something like that with a man in his business. A nice little packet of Saturday morning mail, just right to make a woman look like she had seen a ghost. They had all that day to work it over, with him slipping in the suggestion and her only too willing to act on it. That evening they wrote their letters. When he saw that hers would do, he let her go ahead. He palmed his tablets and took straight ginger ale.

All right, somebody says, but it's

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just an idea in my head, no more. I knew damn well it was just an idea in my head. How could you prove anything like that? Look for charred bits of his suicide letter or the faked report? Look for reversed writing on the ink-blotter? Nuts. At first the only thing that occurred to me was to beat it out of him, but I knew it wouldn't work. Say what you want about the third degree, when a guy like Jones knows he's in the clear if he just keeps his mouth shut, he keeps his mouth shut. I was sure his girl friend wasn't in on it, because what use would she have been? So there it was — no case — nothing but an idea in my head. If you think of me thinking of that woman's last day, with her world blown up in her face, you'll understand my slow boil.

That's why I did what I did. It may look kind of high-handed at first but not when I explain. This thing had shaped up so fast that I hadn't made a report or even talked to anybody at headquarters. Now let's take a look at two different kinds of report. Here's one. Jones had another woman on a string and he bought the tablets — he admitted both. His wife used the tablets in a way not intended, and did it when she learned of the other woman. Her letter proved it. What was against it? A flicker in his eyes as if he knew about the letter, and the word of the woman next door that she seemed in a good mood after the time he said she knew about the other woman. What does it add up to? In police work and jury trials things follow pretty simple lines — fairly crude, if you come right down to it. Somebody might say to me, maybe your hunch is right, maybe there's something fishy, but it's just one of those things. The only case I see might be one against you, for libel or false arrest. Nobody in the world would bring Jones to trial on what you've got, or even issue a warrant — so long as there's that letter.

But how does it look without the letter? Here's the second report. Jones was involved with this other woman and bought some tablets we're not even sure his wife was in the habit of using. He said he told his wife about the woman, but there's only his word for it, and there's good reason for him to lie because his wife had no reason otherwise to commit suicide. She was in good health. The woman next door says she was in good spirits, after Jones says she was in a daze from grief. Suicide? Why? Because he drops the bottle of tablets at her elbow and shoots off his mouth to us? What suggests that it was anything but murder?

Well, I decided to sink the letter. By the time Monday morning came along I had signed statements from the druggist, the neighbor, and from Jones. When I showed up with my chief and the police stenographer, Jones thought it was the formal winding up of the case. He went on record solid about when he told his wife, and how it affected her — even dressed it up a bit. When we left you could

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see the undercoat of satisfaction on his grieving face. My word that we were getting together all the documents in the case must have made him think the letter was right there in the folder.

I didn't take a statement from the other woman. We let her do her backing and filling at the trial. Most of it was taken up with witnesses who had been following her love life with Jones when both of them thought it was their secret. By the time the D.A. started to drive in the nails with the testimony of the druggist, the autopsist, the neighbor, and me, it was in the bag, and nobody was surprised when the jury said guilty and the judge said the chair.

Now I wasn't planning to let any man burn if he was innocent, or even if there was a reasonable doubt. That's what I meant when I said it wasn't as high-handed as it looks. Here's how I figured. If Jones knew about the letter, as I thought he did, he would say so to save himself from the chair — even if it meant telling why he had pretended he didn't know about it — even if it meant admitting that he had induced his wife to commit suicide. Sinking that letter was the one way to put Jones over the barrel, to make him talk. I didn't expect it to come until after the sentence, because they always hope for an acquittal anyway. If he didn't talk at all, I would know I was wrong and I would find the letter and apply for a stay. It would turn up behind the desk or something, and don't think I didn't know how far I was sticking my neck out. I might make it a good story, but it wouldn't be good enough to keep me on the force, or even out of jail. That's what you've got to understand. It was a matter of principle with me, and I was taking all the risks.

It felt to me like a kind of duel, with the thick part coming after the appeal of Jones's lawyers had failed and the execution seemed sure to go through. I thought I knew just how his mind would work. He would have me figured as a crooked cop. He would expect me to come in and proposition him — so much dough if I would find the letter. At least, that would be better — it would be better to let me offer to clear it up than for him to have to tell his story.

So I figured that as a last resort he would send for me. And of course I knew how my mind was working. If he sent for me and mentioned the letter, I would know all I wanted to know. I would give him until the last minute to send for me, but if he didn't send I would get the stay of execution.

He sent for me in the middle of the week before the week set for his execution. He didn't look like the fellow in the suburbs or even in the courtroom, but I won't go into that; I hadn't been having such a good time either. He started to whimper as soon as I sent the turnkey away. What had he done to me? Why was I out to get him? Why? Why? Why? I asked him what he meant, and he said I knew

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what he meant, and I kept saying what, and finally he said, the letter. I told him to wait just a minute and called the turnkey. When I was halfway down the corridor, I took the thing out of my pocket, set a match to it, and kept on going.

He was executed on a Monday.

They said he gobbled and yelled until they shot the dope in him. He was framed, I was a crook, his wife had done it herself — there was a letter, a letter, a letter! It's pretty standard stuff. They say anything, grab at straws that aren't there. It wasn't different enough to be interesting. Nobody asked me questions or even kidded me about it.

And now that I've told it, here's the reason. If you think it's because I want your opinion on how I interpreted the evidence, you're all wrong. With all due respect, I know more about evidence than you do. Looking at facts the way I've described them, and at fellows like Jones, was my work for thirty years — my bread and butter — and I'm not a stupid man. I went over it hard enough at the time, and often enough since, to know that there's just no other way to read the evidence to make sense; so what I say happened between Jones and his wife is what must have happened.

What I want from you, Mr. Queen, is something else — something where your ideas may be better than mine and probably are. I'm not an educated man — not what a person would really call educated — and I haven't read books on ethics and things like that. The way I've gathered my ideas is from talk, or bits in the newspapers, or from things I've seen, or from reading stories. I've read detective stories as lots of police officers do — and don't let them tell you different — and there's something I've noticed. There's rules that don't show on the surface about what's right and what's wrong. I don't mean in some of the stuff that gets printed where there's no rules except to pile the bodies higher and higher, but in stories that thoughtful people can read. One rule seems to be that no man can kill another man, except out in the open, without having to pay for it. I can think of plenty of detective stories where a character ought to get killed and does, and some stories where the character that does the killing is a decent guy who acts from good motives. But unless he acts in the open, what he does always backfires on him. Something hits him — a trick of fate or something like that.

I'm not criticizing the idea in back of this rule, understand, because it's what I want to ask you about. You pick these stories, and you must have a pretty good idea how people's minds work, and what satisfies their sense of justice. I'd just like to know if you don't think that people would stand for an exception to that rule.

Now, take the case of me and Jones. I killed him — I'm not kidding myself about that — and I didn't do it in the open. But what else could I do?

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Keeping out of the open was the one way to put it on him. Should he have got away with it? — with what *he* did? I've seen gun-happy kids go to the chair, and I've helped send them there; but compared with him those kids were clean, even some that had killed policemen. I know what I did was right. I'm proud of what I did.

But life's a queer thing. I never planned to live in a city, or be a police officer. You get into a line of work and try hard and stick at it, even when down in your heart you know something else would suit you better; and pretty soon your time for working is over. If you're lucky like me and retire early, you've got a kind of second life. What I want to do is carpenter around this place, and maybe cut out a little wood for the paper mill, and read, and fish. Do you remember when you were a kid in school, and would wake up and remember it was a holiday or vacation? If you were a kid in a place like this, you would step outside and smell the trees and the lake behind them, and a current would start at your heels and go right up your spine.

It ought to be that way with me now. The lake's right there and I want to fish in it. Why should I be thinking about Jones? Why should I keep thinking about that damned murderer? — and keep thinking about him — and keep thinking — *and nothing else* . . .

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **AGATHA CHRISTIE**

TITLE: **2. *Find the Cook***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Hercule Poirot of the little "gray cells"

LOCALE: Clapham, London

COMMENTS: *It was a dastardly canard—that Hercule Poirot dealt only with mysteries involving Government secrets and Countesses' jewels. He was equally interested in "miserable twopenny affairs" — like The Vanishing of the Clapham Cook.*

AT THE TIME THAT I WAS SHARING rooms with my friend Hercule Poirot, it was my custom to read aloud to him the headlines in the morning newspaper, *The Daily Dispatch.*

The Daily Dispatch was a paper that made the most of any opportunity for sensationalism. Robberies and murders did not lurk obscurely in its back pages. Instead they hit you in the eye in large type on the front page.

Absconding Bank Clerk Disappears with Fifty Thousand Pounds Worth of Negotiable Securities.

Husband Puts His Head in Gas Oven. Unhappy Home Life.

Missing Typist. Pretty Girl of Twenty-One. Where is Edna Field?

"There you are, Poirot, plenty to choose from. An absconding bank clerk, a mysterious suicide, a missing typist — which will you have?"

My friend was in a placid mood. He quietly shook his head.

"I am not greatly attracted to any of them, *mon ami.* Today I feel inclined for the life of ease. It would have to be a very interesting problem to tempt me from my chair. See you, I have affairs of importance of my own to attend to."

"Such as?"

"My wardrobe, Hastings. If I mistake not, there is on my new gray suit the spot of grease — only the unique spot, but it is sufficient to trouble me. Then there is my winter overcoat — I must lay him aside in the powder of Keatings. And I think — yes, I think — the moment is ripe for the trimmings of my mustaches —

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and afterwards I must apply the *pommade.*"

"Well," I said, strolling to the window, "I doubt if you'll be able to carry out this delirious program. That was a ring at the bell. You have a client."

"Unless the affair is one of national importance, I touch it not," declared Poirot with dignity.

A moment later our privacy was invaded by a stout red-faced lady who panted audibly as a result of her rapid ascent of the stairs.

"You're M. Poirot?" she demanded, as she sank into a chair.

"I am Hercule Poirot, yes, madame."

"You're not a bit like what I thought you'd be," said the lady, eyeing him with some disfavor. "Did you pay for the bit in the paper saying what a clever detective you were, or did they put it in themselves?"

"Madame!" said Poirot, drawing himself up.

"I'm sorry, I'm sure, but you know what these papers are nowadays. You begin reading a nice article 'What a bride said to her plain unmarried friend,' and it's all about a simple thing you buy at the chemist's and shampoo your hair with. Nothing but puff. But no offense taken, I hope? I'll tell you what I want you to do for me. I want you to find my cook."

Poirot stared at her; for once his ready tongue failed him. I turned aside to hide the broadening smile I could not control.

"It's all these modern ideas," continued the lady. "Putting notions into servants' heads, wanting to be typists and whatnots. I'd like to know what *my* servants have to complain of — one afternoon and evening off a week, alternate Sundays, washing sent out, same food as we have — and never a bit of margarine in the house, nothing but the very best butter."

She paused for breath and Poirot seized his opportunity. He spoke in his haughtiest manner, rising to his feet as he did so.

"I fear you are making a mistake, madame. I am not holding an inquiry into the conditions of domestic service. I am a private detective."

"I know that," said our visitor. "Didn't I tell you I wanted you to find my cook for me? Walked out of the house on Wednesday, without so much as a word to me, and never came back."

"I am sorry, madame, but I do not touch this particular kind of business. I wish you good morning."

Our visitor snorted with indignation.

"That's it, is it, my fine fellow? Too proud, eh? Only deal with Government secrets and Countesses' jewels? Let me tell you a servant's every bit as important as a tiara to a woman in my position. We can't all be fine ladies going out in our motor cars with our diamonds and our pearls. A good cook's a good cook — and when you lose her, it's as much to you as pearls are to some fine lady."

For a moment or two it appeared to be a tossup between Poirot's dig-

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nity and his sense of humor. Finally he laughed and sat down again.

"Madame, you are in the right, and I am in the wrong. Your remarks are just and intelligent. This case will be a novelty. Never yet have I hunted a missing domestic. Truly here is the problem of national importance that I was demanding of fate just before your arrival. *En avant!* You say this jewel of a cook went out on Wednesday and did not return. That is the day before yesterday."

"Yes, it was her day out."

"But probably, madame, she has met with some accident. Have you inquired at any of the hospitals?"

"That's exactly what I thought yesterday, but this morning, if you please, she sent for her trunk. And not so much as a line to me! If I'd been at home, I'd not have let it go — treating me like that! But I'd just stepped out to the butcher."

"Will you describe her to me?"

"She was middle-aged, stout, black hair turning gray — most respectable. She'd been ten years in her last place. Eliza Dunn, her name was."

"And you had no disagreement with her on the Wednesday?"

"None whatever. That's what makes it all so queer."

"How many servants do you keep, madame?"

"Two. The house-parlormaid, Annie, is a very nice girl. A bit forgetful and her head full of young men, but a good servant if you keep her up to her work."

"Did she and the cook get on well?"

"They had their ups and downs, of course — but on the whole, very well."

"And the girl can throw no light on the mystery?"

"She says not, but you know what servants are — they all hang together."

"Well, well, we must look into this. Where did you say you resided, madame?"

"At Clapham — 88 Prince Albert Road."

"*Bien, Madame*, I will wish you good morning, and you may count upon seeing me at your residence during the course of the day."

Mrs. Todd, for such was our client's name, then took her departure. Poirot looked at me somewhat ruefully.

"Well, well, Hastings, this is a novel affair that we have here. The Disappearance of the Clapham Cook! Never, *never*, must our friend Inspector Japp get to hear of this!"

He then proceeded to heat an iron and carefully removed the grease spot from his gray suit by means of a piece of blotting paper. His mustaches he regretfully postponed to another day, and we set out for Clapham.

Prince Albert Road proved to be a street of small prim houses, all exactly alike, with neat lace curtains veiling the windows, and well polished brass knockers on the doors.

We rang the bell at No. 88, and the door was opened by a neat maid with a pretty face. Mrs. Todd came out in the hall to greet us.

"Don't go, Annie," she cried. "This

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gentleman's a detective and he'll want to ask you some questions."

Annie's face displayed a struggle between alarm and pleasurable excitement.

"I thank you, madame," said Poirot bowing. "I would like to question your maid now — and to see her alone, if I may."

We were shown into a small drawing-room, and when Mrs. Todd, with obvious reluctance, had left the room, Poirot commenced his cross-examination.

"*Voyons, mademoiselle*, all that you shall tell us will be of the greatest importance. You alone can shed any light on the case. Without your assistance I can do nothing."

The alarm vanished from the girl's face and the pleasurable excitement became more strongly marked.

"I'm sure, sir," she said, "I'll tell you anything I can."

"That is good," Poirot beamed approval on her. "Now, first of all what is your own idea? You are a girl of remarkable intelligence — that can be seen at once! What is your own explanation of Eliza's disappearance?"

Thus encouraged, Annie fairly flowed into excited speech.

"White Slavers, sir — I've said so all along! Cook was always warning me against them. '*Don't you sniff no scent, or eat any sweets — no matter how gentlemanly the fellow!*' Those were her words to me. And now they've got her! I'm sure of it. As likely as not, she's been shipped to Turkey or one of them Eastern places where I've heard they like them fat!"

Poirot preserved an admirable gravity.

"But in that case — and it is indeed an idea! — would she have sent for her trunk?"

"Well, I don't know, sir. She'd want her things — even in those foreign places."

"Who came for the trunk — a man?"

"It was Carter Paterson, sir."

"Did you pack it?"

"No, sir, it was already packed and tied with cord."

"Ah, that's interesting. That shows that when she left the house on Wednesday, she had already determined not to return. You see that, do you not?"

"Yes, sir." Annie looked slightly taken aback. "I hadn't thought of that. But it might still have been White Slavers, mightn't it, sir?" she added wistfully.

"Undoubtedly!" said Poirot gravely. He went on: "Did you both occupy the same bedroom?"

"No, sir, we had separate rooms."

"And had Eliza expressed any dissatisfaction at all with her present post? Were you both happy here?"

"She never mentioned leaving. The place is all right —" The girl hesitated.

"Speak freely," said Poirot kindly. "I shall not tell your mistress."

"Well, of course, sir, she's a caution, Missus is. But the food's good. Plenty of it, and no stinting. Something hot for supper, and as much

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frying fat as you like. And anyway, if Eliza did want to make a change, she'd never have gone off this way, I'm sure. She'd have stayed her month. Why, Missus could have a month's wages out of her for doing this!"

"And the work, it is not too hard?"

"Well, she's particular—always poking round in corners and looking for dust. And then there's the lodger, or paying guest as he's always called. But that's only breakfast and dinner, same as Master. They're out all day in the City."

"You like your master?"

"He's all right — very quiet and a bit on the stingy side."

"You can't remember, I suppose, the last thing Eliza said before she went out?"

"Yes, I can. 'If there's any stewed peaches over from the dining-room,' she says, 'we'll have them for supper, and a bit of bacon and some fried potatoes.' Mad over stewed peaches, she was. I shouldn't wonder if they didn't get her that way."

"Was Wednesday her regular day out?"

"Yes, she had Wednesdays and I had Thursdays."

Poirot asked a few more questions, then declared himself satisfied. Annie departed, and Mrs. Todd hurried in, her face alight with curiosity. She had, I felt certain, bitterly resented her exclusion from the room during our conversation with Annie. Poirot, however, was careful to sooth her feelings tactfully.

"It is difficult," he explained, "for a woman of exceptional intelligence such as yourself, madame, to bear patiently the roundabout methods we poor detectives are forced to use. To have patience with stupidity is difficult for the quick-witted."

Having thus charmed away any lingering resentment on Mrs. Todd's part, he brought the conversation round to her husband and elicited the information that he worked with a firm in the City and would not be home until after six.

"Doubtless he is very disturbed and worried by this unaccountable business, Eh? Is it not so?"

"He's never worried," declared Mrs. Todd. "'*Well, well, get another, my dear.*' That's all *he* said! He's so calm that it drives me to distraction sometimes. '*An ungrateful woman,*' he said. '*We are well rid of her.*'"

"What about the other residents of the house, madame?"

"You mean Mr. Simpson, our paying guest? Well, as long as he gets his breakfast and his evening meal all right, *he* doesn't worry."

"What is his profession, madame?"

"He works in a bank." She mentioned its name, and I started slightly, remembering my perusal of *The Daily Dispatch*.

"A young man?"

"Twenty-eight, I believe. Nice quiet young fellow."

"I should like to have a few words with him, and also with your husband, if I may. I will return for that purpose this evening. I venture to sug-

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gest that you should repose yourself a little, madame — you look fatigued."

"I should think I am! First, the worry about Eliza, and then I was at the Sales practically all yesterday, and you know what *that* is, Mr. Poirot, and what with one thing and another and a lot to do in the house, because of course Annie can't do it all — and very likely she'll give notice anyway, being unsettled in this way — well, I'm tired out!"

Poirot murmured sympathetically, and we took our leave.

"It's a curious coincidence," I said, "but that absconding clerk, Davis, was from the same bank as Simpson. Can there be any connection, do you think?"

Poirot smiled.

"At the one end, a defaulting clerk, at the other a vanishing cook. It is hard to see any relation between the two, unless possibly Davis visited Simpson, fell in love with the cook, and persuaded her to accompany him on his flight!"

I laughed. But Poirot remained grave.

"He might have done worse," he said reprovingly. "Remember, Hastings, if you are going into exile, a good cook may be of more comfort than a pretty face!" He paused for a moment and then went on. "It is a curious case, full of contradictory features. I am interested — yes, I am distinctly interested."

That evening we returned to 88 Prince Albert Road and interviewed both Todd and Simpson. The former was a melancholy lantern-jawed man of forty-odd.

"Oh, yes, yes," he said vaguely. "Eliza. Yes, A good cook, I believe. And economical. I make a strong point of economy."

"Can you imagine any reason for her leaving you so suddenly?"

"Oh, well," said Mr. Todd vaguely. "Servants, you know. My wife worries too much. Worn out from always worrying. The whole problem's quite simple really. 'Get another, my dear,' I say. 'Get another.' That's all there is to it. No good crying over spilt milk."

Mr. Simpson was equally unhelpful. He was a quiet inconspicuous young man with spectacles.

"I must have seen her, I suppose," he said. "Elderly woman, wasn't she? Of course, it's the other one I see always, Annie. Nice girl. Very obliging."

"Were those two on good terms with each other?"

Mr. Simpson said he couldn't say — he supposed so.

"Well, we get nothing of interest there, *mon ami*," said Poirot as we left the house. Our departure had been delayed by a burst of vociferous repetition from Mrs. Todd, who repeated everything she had said that morning, but at greater length.

"Are you disappointed?" I asked. "Did you expect to hear something?"

Poirot shook his head.

"There was a possibility, of course," he said. "But I hardly thought it likely."

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The next development was a letter which Poirot received on the following morning. He read it, turned purple with indignation, and handed it to me.

Mrs. Todd regrets that after all she will not avail herself of Mr. Poirot's services. After talking the matter over with her husband she sees that it is foolish to call in a detective about a purely domestic affair. Mrs. Todd encloses a guinea for consultation fee.

"Aha!" cried Poirot angrily. "And they think to get rid of Hercule Poirot like that! As a favor — a great favor — I consent to investigate their miserable little twopenny affair — and they dismiss me *comme ça!* Here, I mistake not, is the hand of Mr. Todd. But I say — no! — thirty-six times no! I will spend my own guineas, thirty-six hundred of them if need be, but I will get to the bottom of this matter!"

"Yes," I said. "But how?"

Poirot calmed down a little.

"*D'abord*," he said, "we will advertise in the papers. Let me see — yes — something like this:

"'*If Eliza Dunn will communicate with this address, she will hear of something to her advantage.*' Put it in all the papers you can think of, Hastings. Then I will make some little inquiries of my own. Go, go — all must be done as quickly as possible!"

I did not see him again until the evening, when he condescended to tell me what he had been doing.

"I have made inquiries at the firm of Mr. Todd. He was not absent on Wednesday, and he bears a good character — so much for him. Then Simpson: on Thursday he was ill and did not come to the bank, but he was there on Wednesday. He was moderately friendly with Davis. Nothing out of the common. There does not seem to be anything there. No. We must place our reliance on the advertisement."

The advertisement duly appeared in all the principal daily papers. By Poirot's orders it was to be continued every day for a week. His eagerness over this trivial matter of a defaulting cook was extraordinary, but I realized that he considered it a point of honor to persevere until he finally succeeded. Several extremely interesting cases were brought to him about this time, but he declined them all. Every morning he would rush at his letters, scrutinize them earnestly, and then put them down with a sigh.

But our patience was rewarded at last. On the Wednesday following Mrs. Todd's visit, our landlady informed us that a person by the name of Eliza Dunn had called.

"*Enfin!*" cried Poirot. "But make her mount then! At once. Immediately."

Thus admonished, our landlady hurried out and returned a moment or two later, ushering in Miss Dunn. Our quarry was much as described: tall, stout, and eminently respectable.

"I came in answer to the advertisement," she explained. "I thought there must be some muddle or other,

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and that perhaps you didn't know I'd already got my legacy."

Poirot was studying her attentively. He drew forward a chair with a flourish.

"The truth of the matter is," he explained, "that your late mistress, Mrs. Todd, was much concerned about you. She feared some accident might have befallen you."

Eliza Dunn seemed very much surprised.

"Didn't she get my letter then?"

"She got no word of any kind." Poirot paused, and then said persuasively: "Recount to me the whole story, will you not?"

Eliza Dunn needed no encouragement. She plunged at once into a lengthy narrative.

"I was just coming home on Wednesday night and had nearly got to the house when a gentleman stopped me. A tall gentleman he was, with a beard and a big hat. 'Miss Eliza Dunn?' he said. 'Yes,' I said. 'I've been inquiring for you at No. 88,' he said. "They told me I might meet you coming along here. Miss Dunn, I have come from Australia specially to find you. Do you happen to know the maiden name of your maternal grandmother?' 'Jane Emmott,' I said. 'Exactly,' he said. 'Now, Miss Dunn, although you may never have heard of the fact, your grandmother had a great friend, Rosa Leech. This friend went to Australia where she married a very wealthy settler. Her two children died in infancy, and she inherited all her husband's property. She died a few months ago, and by her will you inherit a house in this country and a considerable sum of money.'

"You could have knocked me down with a feather," continued Miss Dunn. "For a minute, I was suspicious, and he must have seen it, for he smiled. 'Quite right to be on your guard, Miss Dunn,' he said. 'Here are my credentials.' He handed me a letter from some lawyers in Melbourne, Hurst and Crotchet, and a card. He was Mr. Crotchet. 'There are one or two conditions,' he said. 'Our client was a little eccentric, you know. The bequest is conditional on your taking possession of the house — it is in Cumberland — before twelve o'clock tomorrow. The other condition is of no importance — it is merely a stipulation that you should not be in domestic service.' My face fell. 'Oh! Mr. Crotchet,' I said. 'I'm a cook. Didn't they tell you at the house?' 'Dear, dear,' he said. 'I had no idea of such a thing. I thought you might possibly be a companion or governess there. This is very unfortunate — very unfortunate indeed.'

"'Shall I have to lose all the money?' I said anxious like. He thought for a minute or two. 'There are always ways of getting round the law, Miss Dunn,' he said at last. 'We lawyers know that. The way out here is for you to have left your employment this afternoon.' 'But my month?' I said. 'My dear Miss Dunn,' he said with a smile. 'You can leave an em-

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ployer any minute by forfeiting a month's wages. Your mistress will understand in view of the circumstances. The difficulty is *time!* It is imperative that you should catch the 11:05 from King's Cross to the North. I can advance you ten pounds or so for the fare, and you can write a note at the station to your employer. I will take it to her myself and explain the whole circumstances.' I agreed, of course, and an hour later I was in the train, so flustered that I didn't know whether I was on my head or my heels. Indeed, by the time I got to Cumberland, I was half inclined to think the whole thing was one of those confidence tricks you read about. But I went to the address he had given me — solicitors they were, and it was all right. A nice little house, and an income of three hundred a year. These lawyers knew very little, they'd just got a letter from a gentleman in London instructing them to hand over the house to me and £150 for the first six months. Mr. Crotchet sent up my things to me, but there was no word from Missus. I supposed she was angry and grudged me my bit of luck. She kept back my trunk too, and sent my clothes in paper parcels. But there, of course if she never had my letter, she might think it a bit cool of me."

Poirot had listened attentively to this long history. Now he nodded his head as though completely satisfied.

"Thank you, mademoiselle. There has been, as you say, a little muddle. Permit me to recompense you for your trouble." He handed her an envelope. "You return to Cumberland immediately? A little word in your ear. *Do not forget how to cook.* It is always useful to have something to fall back upon in case things go wrong."

"Credulous," he murmured, after our visitor had departed, "but perhaps not more than most of her class." His face grew grave. "Come, Hastings, there is no time to be lost. Get a taxi while I write a note to Japp."

Poirot was waiting on the doorstep when I returned with the taxi.

"Where are we going?" I asked anxiously.

"First, to send this note by special messenger."

This was done and re-entering the taxi Poirot gave the address to the driver.

"Eighty-eight Prince Albert Road, Clapham."

"So we are going there?"

"*Mais oui.* Though frankly I fear we shall be too late. Our bird will have flown, Hastings."

"Who is our bird?"

Poirot smiled.

"The inconspicuous Mr. Simpson."

"What?" I exclaimed.

"Oh, come, Hastings, do not tell me that all is not clear to you now?"

"The cook was got out of the way, I realize that," I said, slightly piqued. "But why? *Why* should Simpson wish to get her out of the house? Did she know something about him?"

"Nothing whatever."

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"Well, then —"

"He wanted something she had."

"Money? The Australian legacy?"

"No, my friend — something quite different." He paused a moment and then said gravely: "*A battered tin trunk . . .*"

I looked sideways at him. His statement seemed so fantastic that I suspected him of pulling my leg, but he was perfectly grave and serious.

"Seriously, he could buy a trunk if he wanted one," I objected.

"He did not want a new trunk. He wanted a trunk of pedigree, a trunk of assured respectability."

"Look here, Poirot," I cried, "this really is a bit thick. You're joking."

He looked at me.

"You lack the brains and the imagination of Mr. Simpson, Hastings. See here: On Wednesday evening Simpson decoys away the cook. A printed card and a printed sheet of notepaper are simple matters to obtain, and he is willing to pay £150 and a year's house rent to assure the success of his plan. Miss Dunn does not recognize him — the beard and the hat and the slight colonial accent completely deceive her. That is the end of Wednesday — except for the trifling fact that Simpson has helped himself to fifty thousand pounds worth of negotiable securities."

"Simpson — but it was *Davis* —"

"If you will kindly permit me to continue, Hastings! Simpson knows that the theft will be discovered on Thursday afternoon. He does not go to the bank on Thursday, but he lies in wait for Davis when he comes out to lunch. Perhaps he admits the theft and tells Davis he will return the securities to him — anyhow he succeeds in getting Davis to come to Clapham with him. It is the maid's day out, and Mrs. Todd was at the Sales, so there is no one in the house. When the theft is discovered and Davis is missing, the implication will be overwhelming. Davis is the thief! Mr. Simpson will be perfectly safe, and can return to work on the morrow like the honest clerk they think him."

"And Davis?"

Poirot made an expressive gesture, and slowly shook his head.

"It seems too cold-blooded to be believed, and yet what other explanation can there be, *mon ami*. One of the great difficulties for a murderer is the disposal of the body — and Simpson had planned that out beforehand. I was struck at once by the fact that although Eliza Dunn obviously meant to return that night when she went out (witness her remark about the stewed peaches) *yet her trunk was already packed when they came for it.* It was Simpson who sent word to Carter Paterson to call on Friday and it was Simpson who tied up the trunk on Thursday afternoon. What suspicion could possibly arise? A maid leaves and sends for her trunk; it is labeled and addressed ready in her name, probably to a railway station within easy reach of London. On Saturday afternoon, Simpson, in his Australian disguise, claims it, affixes a new label and address, and sends it

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somewhere else, again 'to be left till called for.' When the authorities get suspicious, for excellent reasons, and open it, all that can be elicited will be that a bearded colonial sent it from some junction near London. There will be nothing to connect it with 88 Prince Albert Road. Ah, here we are."

Poirot's deductions were proved correct. Simpson had left two days before. But he was not to escape the consequences of his crime. By the aid of wireless, he was discovered on the *Olympia*, en route to America.

A tin trunk, addressed to Mr. Henry Wintergreen, attracted the attention of railway officials at Glasgow.

It was opened and found to contain the body of the unfortunate Davis.

Mrs. Todd's check for a guinea was never cashed. Instead Poirot had it framed and hung on the wall of our sitting-room.

"It is to me a little reminder, Hastings. Never to despise the trivial, the undignified. A disappearing domestic at one end — a cold-blooded murder at the other. To me, one of the most interesting of my cases."

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The story we now offer is a crackerjack . . . The author, Joseph Petracca, was born in Brooklyn, went to school there, and was graduated from St. John's University in 1941. He moved to Los Angeles in 1946 where he worked as the superintendent of a laundry (shades of Jack London who also knew the ordeal of toil!). Mr. Petracca gave up the laundry to sell soap, and finally gave up selling to devote all his time to writing. His record is phenomenal: his first story was published by "The Atlantic Monthly"; his second story appeared in "Collier's," where it won the $1000 Star Story Award. In 1952 Little, Brown brought out his first book, a novel titled COME BACK TO SORRENTO. *He has also worked successfully in the movie and TV mediums, and at the time of this writing is well advanced on another novel . . .*

Johnny Cinderella was what is known as a "pool-hustler." But compared with other con artists of the cue stick, Johnny had "class written all over him" — the kind of guy "who could strut standing still" . . .

3. JOHNNY CINDERELLA

by JOSEPH PETRACCA

THE MASK OVER THE CLOCK? I'M surprised you didn't notice it before, mister, because all my new customers are always asking me about it — what it's doing there, is it some kind of a club I'm running, and things like that.

Do you know what a pool-hustler is? No?

Then let me warn you, mister, these hustlers are as slick as an eight ball. In the twenty years I've been running this poolroom I've seen a lot of them, real con artists with a cue stick, guys who know every angle of the come-on game. Take my word for it, mister, they're slick. When the bet is small, you'll see them playing like they never held a pool stick in their hands, and in the next game, when the big money is up, they're suddenly shooting like Willie Mosconi, Erwin Rudolph, or Dean Farrell. But the champ of all the pool-hustlers I got to tell you about — this guy who comes into the poolroom one day, a total stranger, and calls himself Johnny Cinderella.

The first time I see Johnny, I'm playing a game of straight pool on the front table with the bookie, Big Ben Brunelli. He's a strict percentage operator, and, besides handling all the horse money on the street, he runs a

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big loan-sharking business out of the Wallabout Social Club, his headquarters around the corner. Between you and I, I never liked Big Ben, not because he had me and half the neighborhood in hock to him most of the time, but because he was the kind of guy who liked to throw his weight around. There's no trick to being tough when you walk around most of the time with a strong-arm boy on each side of you, but this night I'm talking about, Big Ben is all alone.

"Take a look at this guy," he says, spotting Johnny Cinderella at the door. Ben holds up his shot, his deep-sunk dark eyes looking hard at Johnny, a hustler type if you ever saw one. Nobody knows why it is, but if there's one thing the big bookie don't like it's a hustler, although for my part, I'll take a hustler to a loan shark any day. As Big Ben stands there moving his long cigar from one side of his jaw to the other and pushing his cue stick through his fingers, I look over to the entrance. There's this Johnny Cinderella, a good-looking fellow with big black waves dipping in and out of his hair, standing in the doorway and looking around. He's rangy and slope-shouldered, built like a fast welterweight, and after he sizes up the whole poolroom at a glance, he steps inside. We watch him as he goes from table to table, looking the games over.

"Watch this guy, Shorty," Big Ben says to me. "He's looking for somebody to hustle."

After sinking an easy three-way combo, Big Ben chalks up, watching Johnny all the time out of the corner of his eye. Big Ben was never much of a position player and he's left himself without a decent shot on the table. He puts his chalk down, looking first at Johnny and then giving his attention to the table. Since he's leading me by a big score, something like 80–40, he tries a two-cushion billiard shot around a blocked ball, his English carrying the cue ball all the way back to the front of the table, snug against the rail. Well, I don't have to tell you how tough those long ones are up against the rail, and as I'm standing there shaking my head at the cue ball, this Johnny Cinderella stranger comes over and says, "Why don't you play it high — like a half massé?"

Like I mentioned to you before, I've been running a poolroom for a long time, and even though I'm not much of a player, I thought I knew all there was to know about the different shots. But this was new to me. "A *half* massé?" I say, looking across at Johnny. "What the hell is that?"

"Never mind," Johnny says. "Play it your own way."

"Hold it, Shorty," Big Ben says to me, gating the table with his cue stick and coming over. He shoves me to the side and looks Johnny up and down, from the tip of his black, pointy shoes to the crest of his black, wavy hair. "Let him show us this half massé he's talking about."

"Forget it," Johnny says, walking around Big Ben. "Let the little guy play it his own way."

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"No, show us what you mean," Big Ben insists, picking up his cue stick and handing it to Johnny. That was the first time I ever seen Big Ben offer his cue stick to anybody, because, as he always claimed, to a real pool shooter a cue stick is something personal, like a toothbrush, and you just don't go around lending it. It's a fine stick, Big Ben's is, one of those fancy two-sectioned jobs with inlaid mother-of-pearl designs all over it. But Johnny don't reach for the stick.

"What's there to show?" he says, begging off. "Either you know what I'm talking about or you don't."

"Look, kid —" Big Ben begins to say.

"The name is Sidderella," Johnny says: "Johnny Sidderella."

"Look, Cinderella —"

"Have it your own way," Johnny says. "Smarter guys than you couldn't pronounce it."

"What kind of a crack is that?"

"Not a very good one, but I'll get better."

"Look, Cinderella, or whatever your name is," Big Ben says, breathing in a chestful of air and running his thumbs around the inside of his belt. "I met wise guys like you before — and if you got any ideas about hustling any of the guys around here, you'd better get rid of them. I don't like hustlers!"

"It's a standoff," Johnny says, looking right at Big Ben. "I don't like *you*."

That got Big Ben. He don't know what to do. His knuckles begin itching to go into action, but with his strong-arm boys out some place collecting his money, he just stands there full of empty bluster with his hands at his sides. Except for those laughing gray eyes of his, there isn't *that much* of an expression on Johnny's face. Make no mistake about it, mister, Johnny Cinderella could have mopped up the floor with Big Ben, two hundred pounds and all, if he wanted to, and, knowing the way my customers felt about Big Ben, I don't think there would have been anybody in the place to stop him. I wouldn't have, I know, and it wasn't because of the three hundred dollars I owed Big Ben at the time.

Seeing that he can't scare Johnny, Big Ben changes his tactics and kind of backpedals. "All right, Cinderella," he says, pulling a roll of money out of his pocket and flashing it in front of everybody. "How much money have you got? A smart boy like you should be loaded."

"I never stooped to home relief yet," Johnny says, and adds, "— or loan-sharking."

Big Ben forces his lips into a smile. "That's a very funny remark, Cinderella. Now if you're looking for somebody to hustle, how about me? I'll play you a game."

"For how much?" Johnny says.

Everybody's up close now, watching Big Ben and Johnny. The big bookie is jiggling his fat bankroll in his hands. "I'll tell you what I'll do, Cinderella. I'll play you for everything you got in your pocket."

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Johnny laughs. "You wouldn't be trying to hustle *me*, would you? I'll play you for ten bucks."

"Ten bucks!" Big Ben snorts. "Is that all you got in your pocket? I figured a smart operator like you for at least twenty."

"Ten bucks," Johnny says. "Take it or leave it."

"If that's all the money you got," Big Ben says, shrugging his shoulders, "what can I do? You got a game. Rack 'em up, Shorty."

All Big Ben's needling didn't bother Johnny a bit, because there was class written all over him. He was the kind of guy who could strut standing still — he had that kind of personality — and when he walks to the wall racks to choose a cue stick, it's like he was dancing across the floor. He picks out a lightweight stick with a good tip and rolls it over the table to make sure it's straight.

"I'll break," he says, bending over the table.

From the easy way he strokes the cue ball, you had the feeling that Johnny had slept on a lot of pool tables in his day and had gotten up many a morning picking green felt off his clothes. Not that there was anything seedy about the way Johnny dressed, or anything like that, except that to shoot pool the way he did, you had to have breathed in a ton of blue-chalk dust. He was good, real good.

Well, Big Ben and Johnny play about even for the first nine or ten frames, give or take a couple of points either way, but, little by little, Johnny begins to fall back. He's beginning to dog it. The hustle is on, all right, and when Big Ben pulls away from Johnny and finally wins the game, there's no doubt in anybody's mind who the better player is.

"You're not kidding anybody," Big Ben says, taking Johnny's ten bucks. "You can play better than that, *hustler*."

"I'm off my game right now," Johnny says, smiling. "Next time I'll beat you."

"There's not gonna be no next time," Big Ben says. "And let me warn you right now, Cinderella, if you know what's good for you, you'll stay the hell outta here!"

Right then I almost lost my head. Big Ben was going too far. I'd had enough of his guff! Sure, I was three hundred in hock to him but he wasn't going to tell me who'd come in or stay out of my poolroom! And let me tell you, mister, if I hadn't caught a peculiar look in Johnny's eyes as he started out, I would have told Big Ben off right then and there, although, as it turned out, I'm glad I didn't because I would only have made a fool of myself and botched up Johnny's whole plan.

But to come back to the mask over the clock.

Once a year all the poolrooms get treated to some expert shooting. As a sort of advertising stunt, one of the big soda outfits sends the Masked Marvel around to most of the poolrooms in the city, and a couple of weeks before he's scheduled to play in

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my place, Mr. Corcoran, the Masked Marvel's manager, comes around to give me a few posters to hang around the poolroom, pictures of a masked head between crossed cue sticks. Usually the Masked Marvel is the pocket billiards champ of the world, or close to it, and so around the neighborhood his appearance is always a big thing. No matter who I pick to play against the Mask, as he's called, it's still a thousand-to-one shot that my man loses.

Anyways, a few nights before the Mask is to appear, I'm standing behind the counter watching a game of pill-pool between Big Ben and his two strong-arm boys when, just as if nothing ever happened, Johnny Cinderella comes in. The balls stop clicking on all the tables, just like when a cop comes in, and I figure there's going to be trouble. Big Ben stares at Johnny and then looks at his boys, and I look from them to Johnny. Johnny hasn't been around since the posters went up, and without so much as a glance at Big Ben, he walks over to one of the posters next to the counter and looks at it close, trying to guess who it is by the cold eyes.

Before there's an explosion, I run over to Johnny and whisper, "Are you crazy? What are you doing here?"

Johnny pretends not to hear me. He stands back from the poster like an artist, looking at the picture with one eye. "It looks like Dean Farrell."

"Johnny, for God's sake — !" But before I can say anything else, Big Ben comes over and stands between us, leaning heavy on his cue stick. His two boys are right behind him, like there were leashes tied to them. Big Ben blows a cloud of smoke into Johnny's face.

"What's the difference who it is, Cinderella?" he says. "Nobody's gonna beat him anyway."

"I don't know about that."

"Well, *I* know about it," Big Ben says. "I played him last year and I was lucky to make thirty points!"

"Well, no wonder," Johnny says, hitting the poster with the back of his hand. "What did you expect, playing a guy with a mask on his face?"

"What's the mask got to do with it?"

And for the first time since I've known him, the smile disappears off Johnny's face. "I'll tell you what it's got to do with it! Here's a guy who's supposed to be the champ — Dean Farrell — and he plays with a handicap favoring him all the time! What a racket! Especially in pool, a game of nerves and pressures! Why, a guy who comes in wearing a mask has you scared out of your game before you even start!"

Now Big Ben is smiling, seeing that he's got Johnny Cinderella steamed up, and he says, "What's the matter, Cinderella? You sound mad because Farrell's the champ and not you."

"Who's mad?" Johnny says. "I don't even know the bum."

It looks like Big Ben's got Johnny on the ropes, and he's not the kind to let a guy off, either. "So Farrell's a bum, Cinderella? For my money

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you're the bum, Cinderella, not Farrell! Just take a look at yourself sometime — running around from poolroom to poolroom trying to hustle deuces and fins — and take a look at where Farrell is!"

"Where is he?" Johnny says.

"Where you ain't, Cinderella!" Big Ben says. "He's right where you dreamed you'd be. Right up there with the best of them — Rudolph, Mosconi, and Greenleaf."

"He's still a bum," Johnny says.

"If he's such a bum," Big Ben says, nudging me with his elbow, "maybe you'd like to play him Saturday night? Shorty wouldn't mind, would you, Shorty? It's a free game, Cinderella; it won't cost you a cent."

Johnny is looking straight at Big Ben, his eyes cold and steady. Slowly that smile of his comes back to his face, but he don't say anything.

"Well?" Big Ben says.

"I'll play him," Johnny says. "And what's more, I'll beat him."

"You'll what?"

"You heard me."

"For how much, *champ?*"

"For five hundred dollars," Johnny says, and when he says it, me and Big Ben and his strong-arm boys all stand there looking at one another, wondering if Johnny is serious or not. It's the craziest bet I ever heard in my life. But you don't have to look twice at Johnny to know he's not kidding.

"Now, Johnny," I said, suddenly feeling sorry for him and trying to back him off the bet. "Don't go losing your head."

I didn't get any further. Because just then Big Ben, seeing that I was trying to protect a hustler, of all things, pushes me up against the wall and snaps, "Shut up, Shorty! If you're so palsy with this two-bit hustler, maybe you'd like to make a little side bet yourself."

I don't know what to do. Johnny Cinderella is trying to say something to me with his eyes, but I'm so fed up with being pushed around by Big Ben and his mob that I don't know what I'm doing. "All right, you got a bet! A hundred says that Johnny beats the Mask!"

The words leap out of me before I can control them, but it's too late to welsh now. Big Ben smiles over at his two boys, like this is the sucker play of all time. "What's the matter, Shorty, are you getting chicken? If you're gonna bet, bet it big. Why don't you make it three hundred? That's how much you owe me."

"Three hundred it is!" I say, watching the smile getting big on Johnny's face, but even as I say it, a cold sweat breaks out all over me, because I know that I've made a fool of myself, that Johnny hasn't got a chance in a thousand, and that I'll be in hock to Big Ben for the rest of my life. Big Ben is digging into his pocket for his dough.

"You got a bet, Shorty. Now let's see that five hundred, Cinderella."

"Don't worry about the money," Johnny says, pushing Big Ben's hand back into his pocket. "I'll be here with it Saturday night."

Big Ben laughs. "Who do you think

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you're kidding, Cinderella? You're a big bluff and you know it! Penny-ante, that's you! How you gonna raise five hundred — hustling nickels and dimes?"

"I got ways," Johnny says, and, winking at me, he turns around and goes out, leaving us all looking after him.

"Well, boys," Big Ben says, going back to his pill-pool game and looking over his shoulder at me, "not only did we catch a chump, but this is one time we hustle a hustler."

That Saturday night the poolroom's crowded like it's never been all year. All the tables are playing except the one down front, the Number One table. By twenty minutes after eight, ten minutes before game time, there is barely standing room around the front table and the crowd is already restless, waiting for Johnny Cinderella and the Masked Marvel to show up. Big Ben, I notice, has left his two strong-arm boys at the club and he's circulating among the crowd like a ward-heeling politician. After a while he comes over to the counter, puffing a cigar.

"Where's your boy Cinderella, Shorty? D'ya think he scratched?"

I shrugged. "He'll be here. You can never tell about a guy like Johnny."

"I can tell," Big Ben says, spitting a piece of loose tobacco to the floor. "He's broke like all these cheap hustlers — and yellow, too. He won't play anybody but a chump, and if you wanna make another bet, Shorty, I'll bet you a hundred to a sawbuck he don't show!"

I would have taken his bet, but just then one of the kid shooters around the block comes running in, shouting, "Hey, fellers, the Masked Marvel just pulled up!"

There's a mad scramble for the door. Everybody wants a look at the champ before he puts his mask on, but Dean Farrell has been through all this before, and when he steps out of his car, with Mr. Corcoran right behind him carrying his shooting case, he's already wearing his mask, a black, shiny one that fits snug on his head and comes down to his shoulders. From the height of him, you can tell it's Dean Farrell, the pocket billiards champ of the world for the past three years. A couple of kids jump up and try to yank the mask off, but Mr. Corcoran, who, besides being Farrell's manager, is also the spieler for the soda outfit, pushes them away and leads Farrell into the poolroom.

"Hiya, Shorty," Mr. Corcoran says, coming over and shaking my hand; and after I'm introduced to the Masked Marvel for the third year in a row, I introduce him to Big Ben and a few of my old-time customers. Then the champ gets right down to business. Using his own sectioned cue stick and private cue ball, he tries the table with a couple of shots to test the speed of the felt and the cushions. You never saw anybody as happy as Big Ben as he stood leaning against the counter, watching Farrell.

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"Come on," somebody yells. "Let's get the game started!"

Stalling for time, I go over to the table and rack the balls in the triangle, looking over my shoulder toward the door for Johnny Cinderella. After looking at his watch, Mr. Corcoran walks among the crowd, handing out free bottles of soda and asking the people not to crowd the table. By now, twenty minutes to nine, everybody is yelling for the game to start. Big Ben's cigar is down to a stub. Farrell is fidgeting with his cue stick. Finally, Mr. Corcoran, putting his watch away for the dozenth time, comes over and tells me to get somebody up there to shoot — and he don't care if it's Johnny Cinderella or Goldilocks.

"Just another five minutes, Mr. Corcoran."

"All right, Shorty," Mr. Corcoran says, taking out his watch once more and holding it face up in the palm of his hand. "But if you ain't got somebody in five minutes, the game is off."

The minutes ticked away. I was on the spot, so what could I do but pick up a cue stick and play Farrell myself? I figured it was working out for the best, after all. If Johnny didn't show up, Big Ben wouldn't be able to hold me to my bet. Maybe Big Ben was right about Johnny being yellow — and besides, where was he going to hustle five hundred dollars in three days? Sure, Johnny was a better player than me, or Big Ben, or any of the forty-cents-an-hour slouches in the neighborhood, but he wasn't that much better, not from what we'd seen. Make no mistake about it, mister, I got a lot of pride in my poolroom, and more than anything else I wanted to make a good showing against the Mask. But deep down I knew that nobody had a chance against Farrell, Cinderella included, and the match figured to be just another advertising stunt for the soda company to sell more soda.

"All right, Mr. Corcoran," I said, chalking up. "I'll play."

"Who cares?" somebody in the back yells. "We came here to see the Mask!"

Everybody laughs. Mr. Corcoran, taking the game seriously, puts up his hands; the crowd gets quiet. Everybody's eyes is on the Masked Marvel as he approaches the table and puts down his chalk. He is just getting set to shoot up and down the table for the break shot, when somebody near the door yells, "Hey, Shorty, here he is!"

The crowd opens up to let Johnny Cinderella through, and when I see him, I have to hold myself up by the cue stick to keep from falling.

You guessed it, mister. *He's wearing a black mask, just like Dean Farrell's!*

Well, you never saw anything so funny in your life! Mr. Corcoran comes running over to me and wants to know if this is some sort of gag I'm pulling, and that if this is my idea of a joke, he won't permit the game to go on — and furthermore, he will have me blackballed by every soda outfit in the country; and while he's blowing gaskets all over the place,

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Dean Farrell is so shocked to see another Masked Marvel in the poolroom that when Johnny Cinderella goes over to introduce himself, the champ can barely lift his arm to shake Johnny's hand.

But you should have seen Big Ben. He's purple! He nearly swallows his cigar when he sees Johnny fussing around with the mask on his head, like he's a girl trying a hat on. Johnny's having a ball. He's surrounded by everybody in the poolroom asking him who he is and where he comes from and making all kinds of wisecracks about him and his mask. One of the fellows even yells, "Boo!" into the eyeholes.

Watching Big Ben through the slits in his mask, Johnny comes over to me and hands me a roll of fifties. "Here, Shorty, you hold the bet — five hundred dollars."

"Johnny," I say to him, taking the money. "Stop the clowning and take off that mask."

"Who's clowning?" Johnny says, talking loud enough for Mr. Corcoran and Farrell to hear him. "That bum's not getting any advantage on me with that mask on — not for my money, he ain't! Just get Big Ben's money and let's get this game started."

Big Ben is a block of ice. Without saying anything, he hands me his five hundred — also in fifties — and looks over at Johnny, who is half sitting on the rail of the pool table, still fussing around with the mask on his head. Even though you can't see nothing but his eyes, you know he's smiling.

In the meantime the crowd is yelling for the game to start. Mr. Corcoran is fit to be tied, but you know that he's too good a businessman to let the crowd down. He motions to Farrell, who is switching his cue stick from one hand to the other and drying his wet palms along the sides of his pants, and after they go into a huddle and have a talk among themselves, Mr. Corcoran comes over to me and says, "Okay, Shorty, we'll play."

Now the crowd is making so much noise that Mr. Corcoran has to scream above them. "Quiet, please! *Quiet!* If there isn't absolute quiet, I won't let this game go on! That's better. Please, please — will you all keep back from the table! Thank you. The players are about to roll off the back cushion for the break! So bottoms up, friends — the drinks are on us!"

And under his breath, Mr. Corcoran says to the Mask, "Okay, Dean — now go out and get him!"

The game begins.

The Mask loses the roll for the break by a good three inches, and, on his very first shot, trying to play it safe and close to the vest, he misses the pack altogether. I've seen Farrell shoot a half dozen times, but I've never seen him so nervous and fidgety. Every time he looks over at Johnny, wearing the twin of his mask, he chalks up like he's going to knock the rubber tip right off the end of his cue stick.

Nothing rattles Johnny. After he sizes up the table, he sends the cue ball glancing off the side of the pack

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for a pretty good safe shot. Farrell, who is normally a pretty tough competitor to out-safe, just barely loosens the twelve ball off the pack. They spar around with safe shots for a while, and then Farrell nicks the twelve ball again, his cue ball rolling back deep against the cushion.

It looks perfectly safe. There don't seem to be a shot anywhere, but Johnny is bent over the table, shading his hand over the packed balls to look at the lights between them, examining them close to see if the caroms are working in his favor. At last he announces, "Twelve ball in the corner pocket."

"Don't be a sucker," I whisper to Johnny. "Play it safe!"

But Johnny pays no attention to me and gambles on the break-shot. Addressing the cue ball high, sort of like the half massé he was talking about, he slams his cue ball into the tight pack and scatters the balls all over the table. Well, wouldn't you know it — that purple-striped twelve ball bullets its way right into the corner pocket! And if you think Dean Farrell is nervous before, now he's ready for Bellevue, but he tries to take it big and applauds the shot.

"Good shot," he says, but I'm standing close enough to hear the dryness in his throat. Big Ben is right behind me, but I can hardly hear him breathe.

Johnny runs the whole frame, sets up a good break-shot for himself, and, with high English this time, barrels his way right through the second rack, his cue ball going like a fullback with a good head of steam. He runs the second frame as easy as the first and he's halfway into the third frame, a run of thirty-five balls, before he misses his first shot, miscuing on a skinner for the side pocket.

"You ought to buy some good sticks, Shorty," he says to me, talking loud enough for Farrell to hear him.

"Here, try this!" Farrell says, slamming a piece of chalk into Johnny's hand. "They tell me it's good for a shiny point!"

Farrell is mad. When he shoots, he's so upset that he can barely run off the rest of the balls in the frame. Two of them are raggedy shots that were lucky to fall into the pocket — which is bad enough — but when he misses the break-shot for the next frame, he goes berserk completely and you know that the game is over. I look behind me at Big Ben; he's chewing his cigar to shreds.

"This is a hustle, Shorty!" he whispers right into my ear. "A hustle!"

"Whatever it is," I say, grinning, "I'm glad I got three hundred on Johnny."

But there's still a lot of shooting to come yet. Right past the halfway mark, Farrell puts on a good spurt and pulls to within five points of Johnny. Now, with the score standing fifty-two to forty-seven, Johnny Cinderella puts on an exhibition of shooting the likes of which I'll never forget.

You should've seen him, mister. He

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goes around that table like a dancer, studying the arrangement of the balls, and when he shoots, there's something about the way he handles the stick, the easy way he shoots, like DiMag going back for a deep one, that makes you realize you're watching one of the best. He's like a well-oiled machine, clicking away. Ball after ball, frame after frame, he never misses. The hard ones look easy and the easy ones set up the pattern for his whole game. The crowd is quiet. Nobody coughs, nobody applauds, nobody says a word. Johnny just keeps moving smoothly around the table, reminding you of a soft-shoe dancer, and it's not until he sinks his hundredth ball, a ticklish slice shot into the side pocket, that the crowd lets go and begins to yell and crowd around him.

Mister, that's a night to remember. If I live to be a hundred I don't guess I'll ever forget it — and for that matter, I don't guess Dean Farrell, Mr. Corcoran, or Big Ben will, either.

Well, after the game is over and the crowd breaks up a little, Johnny comes over to collect his money, the black mask rolled up under his arm. He tosses the mask on the counter. He's smiling, as usual, but when he takes the money he don't look at Big Ben, who's standing off to the side, breathing murder through his nose.

"The mask's a souvenir for you, Shorty," Johnny says, fanning the money out in his hands. "It sure brought us luck, didn't it, Shorty?"

"You shot a great game, Johnny."

Suddenly, without a word of warning, Big Ben rushes past me and lurches out with his big hands, grabbing Johnny by his coat lapels and twisting them until he pulls Johnny to the tip of his toes. His knuckles are white with rage. "A great game? He cheated, the cheap hustler! And he's not getting away with it!"

"Take your filthy hands off me, you fat slob!" Johnny says; and with that, he quick-punches Big Ben one-two right in the solar plexus, doubling the big bookie over and taking the wind right out of his sails. Big Ben wheezes and groans, looks up like a scared puppy at Johnny, and flops into the nearest chair. After flicking at his clothes and straightening out his tie, Johnny counts off ten fifties and flings them into Big Ben's face, saying, "Here's your five hundred — I guess you need it more than I do."

And he leaves, disappearing through the crowd like a wisp of cigar smoke.

He's not out of the door five minutes and the crowd is still full of murmuring about everything that happened, when Big Ben's two strong-arm boys come rushing in, their hair flying wildly and their suits looking like they been rolling on the floor in them. Both of them are out of breath.

"What is it?" Big Ben says, grabbing both of them by the arms and shaking them. "What happened? Where the hell you been all night?"

"Somebody stuck up the club!" one of them gasps out. "And he tied us up!"

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"It happened about two hours ago," the other one says. "We were sitting in the back office when this guy in a long black mask comes in —"

"A mask!" Big Ben nearly falls through the floor.

"Yeah, and he's got a gun," the first one says. "And he tells us to open the safe —"

"So after we open it and he takes out the money," the second one says, "do you know what he does then? The crazy guy counts off five hundred dollars and puts the rest back!"

Well, mister, that's Johnny's mask you see hanging up there over the clock. I've never seen him to this day, but about this time of the year when Mr. Corcoran comes around to put up his posters, I always get to thinking of Johnny Cinderella and wondering what he's doing.

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THE EXPLOITS OF GERVASE FEN

4. THE LION'S TOOTH

by EDMUND CRISPIN

IT LAY EMBEDDED IN CRUDELY wrought silver, surrounded by big lustreless semi-precious stones. Graven on the reverse of the silver was an outline which Gervase Fen recognised as the ichthys, the pass-sign, of primitive Christianity.

"Naturally, one thinks of Androcles," said Reverend Mother. "Or if not of him especially, then of the many other early Christians who faced the lions in the arena." She paused, then added, "This, you know, is the convent's only relic. Apparently it is also our only clue."

She stooped to replace it in the sacristy cupboard; and Fen, while he waited, thought of frail old Sister St. Jude, victim of a vicious assault, who lay now in a nearby room — Sister St. Jude whose only intelligible words, since they had found her, had been "The tooth of a lion!" and again — urgently, repeatedly — "The tooth of a lion!"

He thought, too, of the eleven-year-old girl who had been kidnaped, and of her father who had obstinately refused to divulge to the police the means through which the ransom was to be paid, for fear that in trying to catch the kidnaper they would blunder and bring about the death of his only child. He would rather pay, he had said, and from this decision he was in no way to be moved.

It had been Reverend Mother who had insisted on consulting Gervase Fen; but following her now, as she led the way back to her office, he doubted if there was much he could do. The available facts were altogether too arid and too few. Francis Merrill was middle-aged, a widower and a wealthy businessman. Two weeks ago, immediately after Christmas, he had gone off to the Continent, leaving his daughter Mary, at her own request, in the care of the Sisters. During the mornings Mary had helped the Sisters with their chores. But in the afternoons, with Reverend Mother's encouragement, she would usually go out and ramble round the countryside.

On most of these outings Mary Merrill was accompanied, for a short distance, by Sister St. Jude. Sister St. Jude was ailing; the doctors, however, had decreed that she must get plenty of fresh air, so even through the recent long weeks of frost and ice she had continued to go outdoors, warmly dressed, and spend an hour or two each afternoon on a sheltered seat near the summit of the small hill behind the convent. It had been Mary Merrill's habit to see her settled

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there and then to wander off on her own.

Until, this last Tuesday, a search party of the Sisters had come upon Sister St. Jude sprawled near her accustomed seat with concussion of the brain.

Mary Merrill had not come home that night. Reverend Mother had immediately notified the police; and Francis Merrill, hastening back from Italy, had found a ransom note awaiting him. To all intents and purposes, that was all — the police so far had achieved precisely nothing. If only, Fen reflected, if only one knew more about the girl herself: for instance, where she was likely to have gone, and what she was likely to have done, on these rambles of hers. But Francis Merrill had refused even to meet Fen; and Reverend Mother had been unable to produce any information about Mary more specific and instructive than the statement that she had been a friendly, trusting, ordinary sort of child.

"I suppose," said Fen, dropping wearily into a chair, "that it's quite certain Sister St. Jude has never said anything comprehensible *other* than this phrase about the lion's tooth?"

"Absolutely certain, I am afraid," Reverend Mother replied. "Apart from a few — a few sounds which may conceivably have been French words, she has not yet been able —"

"*French* words?"

"Yes. I should have mentioned, perhaps, that Sister St. Jude is a Frenchwoman."

"I see," said Fen slowly. "I see. . . . Tell me, did she — does she, I mean — speak English fluently?"

"Not very fluently, no. She has only been over here a few months or so. Her vocabulary, for instance, is still rather limited. . . ." Reverend Mother hesitated. "Perhaps you are thinking that the phrase about the lion's tooth may have been misheard. But she has used it many times, in the presence of others of us — including Sister Bartholomew, who is also a Frenchwoman — and none of us has ever had the least doubt what the words were."

"Not misheard," said Fen pensively, "but misinterpreted, perhaps. . . ." Looking up, Reverend Mother saw that he was on his feet again. "Reverend Mother, I have an idea," he went on, "or an inkling, rather. At present I don't see at all how it applies. But nonetheless, I think that if you'll excuse me, I'll go now and take a look at the place where Sister St. Jude was attacked. There's a certain object to be looked for there, which the police may well have found, but decided to ignore."

"What kind of object?" Reverend Mother asked.

Gervase Fen smiled at her.

"Yellow," he said. "Something yellow."

No prolonged search was needed: there the thing lay, in full view of everyone, as plain as the nose on a policeman's face. In a mood of complacency which the Reverend Mother

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would hardly have approved, Fen pocketed it, climbed the remaining distance to the top of the little hill, and looked around him. The complacency waned somewhat: from this vantage-point, he could see buildings galore. Still, with any luck at all. . . .

The gods were with him that day: within three hours — three hours of peering over hedges and of surreptitious trespassing in other people's gardens — he had located the particular house he sought. A glance at the local directory, a rapid but rewarding contact with the child population of a neighboring village, and by six o'clock he was ready for action.

The man who answered his knock on the front door was gray-haired, weedy, nervous-seeming; while not unprepossessing, he yet had something of a hungry look. "Mr. Jones?" said Fen, pushing the man back into his own hall before he had time to realize what was happening; and without waiting for a reply, Fen added, "I've come for the child."

"The child?" Mr. Jones looked blank. "There's no child here. I'm afraid you've got the wrong house."

"Indeed I haven't," said Fen confidently. And even as he spoke, the thin, high scream of a young girl welled up from somewhere on the premises, followed by incoherent, sobbing appeals for help. Fen noted the particular door to which pallid Mr. Jones's eyes immediately turned — an interesting door, in that it lay well away from the direction whence the scream had come. . . .

"Yes, we'll go through there, I think," said Fen pleasantly, and now there was an automatic pistol in his hand. "It leads to the cellar, I expect. And since I'm not at all fond of men who try to smash in the skulls of helpless old nuns, you may rely on my shooting you without the slightest hesitation or compunction if you make a single false move."

Later, when Mr. Jones had been taken away by the police, and Mary Merrill, hysterical but otherwise not much harmed, was restored to her father, Fen went round to the back garden, where he found an engaging female urchin wandering about eating a large bar of chocolate cream.

"That was jolly good," he told her, handing over the promised ten-shilling note. "When you grow up, you ought to go on the stage."

She grinned at him. "Some scream, Mister, eh?" she said.

"Some scream," Fen agreed.

"It's obvious," Fen said to Reverend Mother over lunch the next day, "that Mary Merrill made friends with Jones soon after she came here, and got into the habit of visiting him nearly every afternoon. No harm in that. But then he found out who her father was and began envisaging the possibility of making some easy money. . . .

"What actually happened, I understand, is that Mary, on that last visit, became frightened at something odd and constrained in his attitude to her,

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and succeeded in slipping away while his back was turned. Whereupon he very stupidly followed her (in his car, except for the last bit) and tried to grab her when she was already quite close to home. She eluded him again, and ran to Sister St. Jude for protection. But by that time Jones had gone too far for retreat to be practicable or safe; so he ran after her, struck Sister St. Jude down with his stick, and this time really did succeed in capturing Mary, knocking her out, and so getting her back to his house. Whether the dandelion part of it belongs to that particular afternoon, or to some previous one, I'm not sure, but whichever it was, Sister St. Jude clearly noticed the flower and equally clearly realized, even in her illness and delirium, that it provided a clue to —"

"Wait, please," Reverend Mother implored him. "Did you say *dandelion?*"

Fen nodded. "Yes, dandelion. English corruption of the French *dent-de-lion* — which of course means a lion's tooth. But Sister St. Jude's vocabulary was limited: she didn't know the English name for it. Therefore she translated it literally, forgetting altogether the existence of that confusing, but highly irrelevant, relic of yours. . . .

"Well, I ask you: a dandelion, in January, after weeks of hard frost! But Mary Merrill had managed to find one, had picked it, and then perhaps put it into a buttonhole of her frock. . . . As every gardener knows, dandelions are prolific and hardy brutes; but in view of the recent weather this particular dandelion could really have come *only* from a hothouse — a neglected hothouse not too far from here. As soon as I saw Jones's, I was certain it was the right one."

Reverend Mother looked at him. "You were, were you?" she said.

"Well, no, actually I wasn't certain at all," Fen admitted. "But I thought that the luck I'd had up to then would probably hold, and anyway I haven't the slightest objection to terrorizing innocent householders so long as it's in a good cause."

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **BEN AMES WILLIAMS**

TITLE: **5. *Not a Drum Was Heard***

TYPE: Western Crime Story

LOCALE: A frontier town in the Southwest

TIME: 1881

COMMENTS: *The two cowboys were pardners — not partners, mind you — there's a world of difference . . . especially when both are in love with the same girl.*

THIS IS, IN ALL ESSENTIALS, A TRUE story. It came through an old friend from the Southwest, a newspaperman, who telephoned an invitation to lunch the other day. He says he remembers, as a boy, seeing the whole population of his home town embark on horseback, in wagons, and afoot to go to the hanging. That was in 1881; but it was not till twenty years afterward that he heard from one Chris O'Neill the true inwardness of that hanging, as he told it to me over our coffee. The thing happened in a little frontier town in the cow country; and since swift justice and a ready rope were characteristics of the time and the place, it occasioned only passing comment in that day. Nevertheless, this tale is different and it may well bear preserving.

I cannot hope to reproduce my friend's words, nor the atmosphere of those reckless times, so long dead, which he brought back to life for me. Nevertheless, here is the substance of the story that he told . . .

There were two cowboys in the OKO outfit, otherwise called the Hourglass; and these two men were pardners. This, I was given to understand, is a very different thing from being partners. The relationship is the same, though it appears under a slightly different name. The two men were named Jack Mills and Bud Loupel. If you hired one, you hired both. If one was fired, the other quit. If you licked one, the other licked you; and if one became involved in a shooting affray, the other was apt to

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be somewhere in the background with a gun in his hand and an eye out for possible sharp practice by allies of the party of the second part. The foreman of the Hourglass, being wise in his generation, assigned the two to tasks at which they could work together; and they stayed with that outfit for a length of time that was considered extraordinary in those tempestuous days. That is to say, they labored in the vineyard for the OKO for a matter of a year and a half. At the end of that time Jack Mills was twenty-one and Bud Loupel was twenty-two.

As they did their work jointly, so they took their pleasure together; and it came to pass on a certain day that they rode away to town with full pockets and lively plans for the evenings immediately before them. Jack Mills, always the gayer spirit of the two, pulled his gun at the edge of town and perforated the blue sky above him. At the same time he emitted certain shrill sounds and spurred his horse to the gallop. Bud was more given to a certain sobriety and decorum; he did not shoot and he did not yell. But his horse kept close beside the other's. They swung into the wide and dusty main street with hats flapping and holsters pounding against their thighs. They swept up the street together, saw the same vision at the same instant, and jerked their horses to a sliding, tail-grinding stop with a single movement of their bridle hands.

The vision's name was Jeanie Ross. She was the daughter of old man Ross, the storekeeper, and she had just come home from the East. The rattle of the shots had brought her to the door of the store, and she stood there when the two cowboys discovered her. She looked at them; they stared at her. Then Jack Mills swung boldly to the ground and walked toward her, grinning in his pleasantly likeable way. He swept his wide hat low, and he said: "Ma'am, I'm Jack Mills of the Hourglass."

The girl, though she had lived long in the East, was a daughter of the West. She was amused and not displeased, for Jack was easy enough to look at. She smiled, and this emboldened Bud Loupel, who was always conservative, to imitate his pardner's example. He, too, dismounted and stepped forward, and Jack Mills bowed again to the girl and told her: "Furthermore, ma'am, this here is my bashful friend, Bud Loupel. The cat has got his tongue, but he's a nice little fellow. Now you know everybody worth knowing."

Jeanie Ross, still very much amused, asked, "Who were you shooting at?"

"The man in the moon," said Jack Mills. "But I missed him a mile."

She laughed and said she was glad of that. "I'd hate not to be able to see him up there once in a while," she told Jack.

"Just to prove he ain't hurt," he assured her, "I'll ride in and point him out to you when the signs is right."

She shook her head, looking from

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one man to the other, withdrawing a little into the doorway. Jack marked, even then, that her eyes rested longer on Bud Loupel. "I've studied astronomy my own self," she said, and while he was still crushed by that she backed into the store and disappeared.

The two mounted in silence and continued more demurely down the street. In front of Brady's they hitched their horses, tramped dustily inside, and touched elbows at the bar. The first drink was taken without speech.

After a while Bud Loupel said, "Jack!"

"Huh?"

"Me, you know what I aim to do?"

Mills grinned. "I don't know, but I'm waiting."

"I aim," said Bud Loupel, "to quit the range and get me a job in this here little old town."

Jack Mills banged his open hand upon the bar. "Bud, she sure is that and more," he cried. "Just make it the same for me."

They had ridden into town, as has been said, with full pockets. They had expected to ride out again in a day or two with empty ones. But the encounter with Jeanie Ross and their subsequent abrupt decision made all the difference in the world. The procedure of each one, in the circumstances, was characteristic. Bud Loupel crossed the street to the bank and opened an account, depositing his money. Jack Mills went into Brady's backroom, where there was a bank of another kind, and set to work to double his.

The bank Bud patronized was owned by Sam Rand, who was also cashier, president, and board of directors. There had been, till some three days before, a teller, but Rand had let him go. Bud found the banker, as a consequence, up to his eyes in unaccustomed work. Rand knew Loupel, knew that the cowboy had a certain aptitude for figures. When Bud, in the casual talk that followed his deposit, mentioned the fact that he was hunting for a town job, Rand hired him on the spot.

An hour or so later Bud went back to Brady's to tell Jack of his good fortune, and Mills rolled a cigarette and said cheerfully, "Then you're fixed to lend me five dollars."

"As quick as this?" Bud asked. "You must have picked 'em mighty scant."

"I didn't pick them," Jack told him. "They picked me."

They went out together and sought a restaurant and food. By supper time Jack had a job in the blacksmith shop. He was as good with horses as Bud was with figures. That evening they hired a room, and Bud wrote a note to the Hourglass foreman, telling him not to expect them back again. Then they settled down to live the life of sober and substantial citizens. Object: matrimony.

Now, this is not a story of how a woman came between two men and turned good friends into enemies.

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Jeanie Ross did nothing of the kind. It is a fact that they both loved her and that they both wooed her, but it is also a fact that they continued to be pardners just the same. And it is furthermore true that when Jeanie made up her mind between them, Jack was the first one she told.

She told him she was going to marry Bud. And Jack rolled a cigarette with both hands, slowly and with care; he fashioned it neatly, and stroked it between his fingers, and twisted the ends and lighted it before he spoke at all.

"Said so to him?" he asked then.

Jeanie shook her head. "No. I wanted you to know first, because I want you and Bud to keep on being friends. I like you, Jack. But you're—flighty. Bud's steady. You're more amusing sometimes, but he's more reliable. I couldn't ever really count on you. I can count on Bud. But you will go on being friends with him, won't you? That's why I'm telling you."

"He's steady, he's reliable, and you can count on him," Jack repeated, ticking the points off upon his fingers. "Now, is there maybe any other little thing besides?"

"Yes," said Jeanie softly. "Yes. I love him, Jack."

He flicked his cigarette away. "Keno!" he exclaimed. "And Bud's a good scout too. I don't reckon you'll ever need to be sorry at all." He picked up his hat and started away.

"Where are you going?" she asked softly, and there were tears in her eyes for him.

"I aim to tell Bud you're a-waiting," he said.

And he did. Bud was working late that night at the bank. Jack bade him go and find her. "And, Bud," he warned good-humoredly, "I'll aim to perforate you, sudden and complete, if you don't name the first after me."

When Bud was gone Jack stood very still for a while, whistling a little tune between his teeth. Then he went across to Brady's and had a drink or two, but the liquor would not bite. It was still early in the evening when he sought the room he shared with Bud and went to bed. Bud, returning two hours later, undressed quietly, because he thought his pardner was asleep.

But Jack Mills was not asleep.

The first was a boy, and was well and duly named Jack Loupel; and Uncle Jack used to go to the house for Sunday dinner and play bear all over the floor of the sitting-room. The next was a girl, and the next was a boy again. Bud was by that time cashier of the bank, and Sam Rand left most of the work to him. Jack Mills was just what he had always been; that is to say, a likable, wild young chap with a quick gun and a reckless eye and a fondness for the society he found at Brady's. Sometimes, after eating one of Jeanie's dinners, he would take his horse and ride out of town and be gone for a day or two. He was always alone on

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these excursions; but ranging cowboys came across him now and then and reported that he seemed to be just sitting around, smoking, doing nothing at all. When he got ready he would drift back into town and go to work again. Old man Ross liked him; Jeanie liked him; everybody liked him. But the sober citizens were also inclined to disapprove of him; and some of the stories that came to Jeanie's ears made her think that when the children were a little older she had better quit asking Jack to come to the house. She hated to think of doing this; and because she was kind of heart, it is unlikely that she would ever have come to the actual point. But that the possibility should occur to her is some measure of the man's standing in the town.

One day, about seven years after Bud and Jeanie were married, Bud sought out Jack Mills and asked him to get his horse and come for a ride. "Want to tell you something, Jack," he explained.

Mills saw the trouble and distress in the other's eyes, so he saddled up, and they trotted out of town. When the last building was well behind them, Jack asked mildly, "What's on your mind, Bud?"

Bud Loupel, with some hesitation, said, "I'm in trouble."

"Yeah, I judged so," Mills told him. "Well, what brand?"

"I've been putting money in the market at Wichita," Loupel said. "I've had rotten luck. It's gone."

Jack nodded. "I got three-four hundred in the bank," he suggested. "Take that."

"It's not enough."

"Maybe I could look around and raise five hundred more."

"It wouldn't do a bit of good."

Mills produced tobacco and papers and rolled a slow cigarette while their horses jogged along. At last: "How much?" he asked.

"Forty-four hundred."

"You've saved a right smart, ain't you?"

"It's the bank's," Loupel confessed, and Jack puffed deeply, expelled the smoke in a cloud, and remarked:

"Well, at a guess, I'd say you were a damned fool."

"I know it."

Their horses plodded on, and the dust cloud rose and hovered in the air behind them. For a space neither man spoke at all. Then Loupel exclaimed bitterly, "I'm not whining for my own sake, Jack. If it was me, I'd hop out. I'd take a chance. But Jeanie . . ."

"Sure," Jack Mills mildly agreed.

"Damn it, Jack, Jeanie's proud of me. She's proud of me."

"Sure."

"I can't bear to think of her knowing. It would just about bust her."

Mills drawled, "Your sentiments does you credit, Bud."

There was a cold and scornful anger in his tone that kept the other for the moment silent. They rode on, side by side, and Loupel, covertly watching the younger man, waited for him to speak. Mills finished his

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cigarette, eyes straight before him, face unchanging. Then he flicked the butt away, turned in his saddle, and looked at his pardner.

"What's Rand say?" he asked.

"He's been away. Due back tomorrow afternoon. He'll spot it in a minute."

Mills whistled for a moment, between his teeth, a gallant little tune; then he nodded, as though in decision, and asked, "All right, Bud. What's your idea?"

While they rode on toward the low hills south of the town, Bud Loupel outlined his idea; and when they turned back again at sunset Jack had agreed to do what the other asked of him.

At 10 o'clock next morning the town lay still and shimmering in the blistering sun of a summer day. There were one or two men in Brady's, and here and there along Main Street other figures lounged in the shade. Jack Mills rode in from the south on a strange horse, wearing new overalls and an indistinguishable hat. There was a red bandanna loosely knotted about his neck. He encountered no one within recognizing distance. In front of the bank he dropped off, hitched the horse, lifted the handkerchief so that it hid his mouth and nose, and stepped into the building. Two or three people at some distance saw him go in, and idly wondered who the stranger was.

He had hoped to find Loupel alone in the bank, but Jim Paine was there. Paine had just cashed a check and stood with his back toward the door, talking to Bud. When Bud saw the masked man he turned pale; Jim marked the change in his countenance and whirled around. But Jack's gun was leveled, so Bud and Jim Paine reached for the ceiling.

Jack, with some attempt to disguise his voice, said harshly to Bud, "Paper money. All of it. Quick!"

Loupel, hands still in the air, started toward the safe. Jack looked that way and saw that the safe door was open. He changed his mind.

"Wait," he commanded. With a gesture he bade Paine face the wall. Then he leaped the counter, motioned Loupel aside, and himself approached the safe. Paine, watching sidewise, saw the masked man drag out half a dozen packets of bills and stuff them into the front of his shirt. Jack did this with his left hand; his right hand held the gun, and his eyes covered Paine and Loupel almost constantly. Loupel, backed into a corner, watched in silence.

When Jack had taken what he came for, he rose and turned toward the counter again. At that instant a gun roared behind him, and something tugged at his shirt, under the left arm. He whirled, saw Rand standing in the back door of the bank building. Rand's gun was going. Jack fanned his hammer twice, and the banker fell.

Paine had not moved. Jack swung, half crouching, toward Loupel. Loupel had doublecrossed him. That

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was the thought that tightened his finger on the trigger. But — Jeanie! That was the thought which made his trigger finger relax. He slid across the counter, made the door in one jump. Five seconds after his shot, his horse was galloping out of town. And as he passed the last house a rifle spoke, somewhere behind him.

Half a mile from town he looked back and saw three or four horsemen just emerging from Main Street. On their heels others appeared. He laughed a grim little laugh, and slid forward in his stirrups to help his horse to greater speed. But when he reached the hills, some half a dozen miles south of town, they were close behind him, and their rifles were reaching out. He knew a certain cave, a narrow, shallow cover. Poor refuge, but better than none.

In this cave they brought him to bay. He lay prone behind the boulder that screened and half closed the entrance, and watched them draw off and circle to enclose him. "Got a little while," he said to himself. "Fireworks won't start right away."

Satisfied of this, he rolled a little on his side and drew from the front of his shirt the packages he had taken from the safe. Strictly in line with Bud Loupel's well-laid plan, these were simply dummy packets of waste paper, with a genuine bill on the outside of each bundle. Jack placed them on the ground and studied them thoughtfully, considering their significance.

His situation was sufficiently desperate. Rand was dead. He had no doubt of that, and he regretted it. He had always liked Rand, but there had been no choice at the moment. The question was, what next? These fake bundles of money had their place in the scheme of things. If he kept them, told the true story, they might well save his life. Frontier justice was swift, but it was also tempered by considerations not accepted under a more rigid system of law. If he proved Bud Loupel's part in this, Bud would be damned, and he might himself be saved. And the dummy bundles would prove Bud's guilty foreknowledge of the robbery.

A rifle bullet spattered on the rock above him, and he postponed decision. "Needs thinking over," he told himself. "We'll see what we will see."

They held him in siege all that afternoon, and toward sunset brought a barrel of kerosene from town. Men climbed the hill above the cave, where the bullets could not reach them, and poured this oil so that it ran down into a pool just in front of his retreat. Then they set fire to it. He saw at once that he could not endure the smoke and gas, and after some preparations shouted his surrender.

They bade him come out with his hands in the air, and he did so. His boots were somewhat scorched by the flames. Then they tied his hands behind his back and his ankles beneath the horse's belly, and took him back to town. Toward dusk he was lodged in the calaboose there, and

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Nick Russ, the deputy, went on guard outside.

About 9 o'clock that night Bud Loupel came to the calaboose and asked if he could talk with Jack Mills. Russ told him to go ahead. Bud asked permission to talk privately; and though Russ was inclined to protest, he was at length persuaded. The deputy moved away from the little, one-room building, and Bud went inside.

Loupel was sweating faintly. "For God's sake, Jack," he whispered. "This is terrible!"

Mills grinned. "Well," he agreed. "It looks right critical to me."

"If Rand hadn't happened to get back ahead of time . . ."

"You didn't happen to know he was coming, I don't reckon."

Loupel cried, "No, no, Jack. Honest to God!"

Mills nodded. "I know. I thought at first you did; but I reckon you wouldn't play it that low down. Is he — hurt much?"

"Oh, you got him."

"Yeah," said Mills. "Well, that's tough, too. When is it going to happen to me?"

"Tomorrow morning."

Loupel gripped the stout timbers to stop the trembling of his hands. There was a terrible and pitiful anxiety in his voice. "Jack!" he whispered. "Have you told?"

Mills turned his head away; he could not bear to look upon this old friend of his. "Why, no," he said gently. "No, Bud, I ain't told. Don't aim to, if that helps any."

"But the money," Bud stammered. "The packages of bills. You couldn't get rid of them. When they find them, they'll know."

"They won't find them bundles," Jack Mills told him; and while Bud could only stare with widening eyes, he cheerfully explained, "You see, I was cold for a spell. So I had me a little bonfire in that cave."

There was something hideous and craven in the relief that leaped into the eyes of Bud Loupel. Mills reached through the bars, caught the other's shoulder, shook him upright. "Take a brace, Bud," he said gently. "Go on home."

Bud Loupel could not speak. He turned and went stumbling toward the door; he forgot so little a thing as shaking his pardner's hand in farewell. Jack watched him go; and as the other reached the door he called out, "Take care of Jeanie, Bud."

Loupel turned to look back, muttered a low assent, went on his way. Mills heard him speak to Russ as he departed. Then the deputy came to look in and make sure that the prisoner was still secure. He resumed his seat outside the door.

Jack Mills went back to the bench against the rear of his cell and rolled and smoked a cigarette. Then he lay down, and the man on guard heard him whistling.

Heard him whistling softly, between his teeth, a gay and gallant and triumphant little tune.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **BEN BENSON**

TITLE: **6. *The Big Kiss-Off***

TYPE: Detective Story — an original for our **Black Mask** section

LOCALE: The Berkshires, Massachusetts

COMMENTS: *The girl on the mountain, for all her innocent blue eyes, had a strange story to tell — but there was no doubt she was in trouble. Tough, ruthless men were after her . . .*

FROM THE WINDOW OF THE LOG cabin she saw the green sedan stall and come to a stop on the winding dirt road below. Then she watched as a man stepped out of the car — a tall young man, wearing a neat blue suit and striped tie. He was hatless and his light brown hair was cropped short. The man moved around to the hood of the car, opened it, and peered inside. After puttering around for a moment, he straightened up and gazed across the foothills of the Berkshires, to the autumn foliage and the smoky haze of the air. Turning, he looked up the steep hill at the log cabin nestling under the tall pines.

The man started to climb the hill. Inside the cabin she edged away from the window, flattening herself against the wall, one hand gripping a small, pearl-handled automatic pistol. She heard the man's footsteps on the gravel outside and then the creak of the floorboards on the open porch. A hard rap sounded on the locked door. She stood without moving, calmly and silently. The man rapped again. After a moment she heard the boards creak again and the footsteps once more on the gravel.

The sound of the footsteps went along the side of the house and her finger tensed on the trigger of the automatic — because now the man was sure to see her own car behind the cabin.

She waited. The footsteps came back and then faded away. Peering out of the corner of the window she saw the man returning to his car. When he reached it he stopped and lit a cigarette, gazing around, shading his eyes from the late afternoon sun.

She watched as he opened the door of the green sedan and brought out a

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road map. He studied it, scratched his jaw, then moved over and sat down on a rock beside the road.

It couldn't be one of Eddie Stewart's men, she thought, shaking her short blonde hair. They were stupid, all of them. If they had found her hiding place they would have come up without any finesse and simply kicked the door in. No, this had to be a complete stranger whose car had broken down.

Confidently, she unbolted the door, opened it, and shouted, "Hello, there!"

When the young man heard her voice he got up off the rock and trudged up to her. His face was a little damp with perspiration. He took out a handkerchief and dabbed at it.

Holding the little automatic hidden behind her back, she kept the door only half open, ready to shut it in an instant. "I thought I heard somebody knock," she said rapidly. "I was taking a shower and —"

"Sorry to be of trouble, ma'am," he said. "But I think there's something wrong with the carburetor of my car. If I could use your phone —"

"I don't have a phone here."

He looked around doubtfully. She added quickly, "There are no other cabins nearby. You'd best go back the way you came. There's a gas station at the intersection two miles down. You probably saw it."

"Yes," he said wryly. "But I don't relish the walk."

She said very casually, "Where were you heading?"

"To North Adams."

She narrowed the door space a little, thinking; the pearl-handled .32 automatic in her hand contained four cartridges in the magazine and one in the chamber. She could kill him easily before he made a move. "You're on the wrong road for North Adams. You should be on Route Two."

"I know. I usually go on Route Two. But I spent the weekend with some friends down at the lake. They told me I could get to North Adams this way."

"What friends?"

"The Waltons. Emmy and Joe. You know them?"

She shook her head. "It's odd your car broke down just at this point."

"It didn't break down," he said patiently. "Nothing wrong but the mixture in the carburetor. For this altitude I should have been using high-octane gas. As soon as I get some in the tank I'll be all right." He turned away. "Well, I'd better start walking, I guess."

"Wait a minute," she said suddenly.

He turned back, studying her, taking in her smooth young face, the short-cropped blonde hair, and the slim lithe figure.

"When you came by the intersection below," she said, "did you notice anybody there? Another car or something?"

He stared at her. "Yes, I did. Two men in a car."

"Oh. What were they doing?"

"I didn't notice particularly. They were just parked there."

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"Please describe those two men. Did one of them have a mustache and glasses? Was the other very dapper, handsome, with slick black hair?"

"To tell the truth I didn't notice."

"Would you do me a favor?" she asked abruptly. "Up above here, about three miles, the main highway — Route Eight — cuts across this road. All I want you to do is drive up to it and tell me if there are more men waiting there."

He rubbed his chin with the heel of his palm. "Well, I don't know what reason I'd have to —"

"I'm alone here," she said. "All alone." She'd have no trouble handling this one, she thought. He was well-dressed and well-mannered. The quixotic type. Blink your eyes helplessly at him, tell him you're a girl in distress, and he'd fall for it because it was the gallant and gentlemanly thing to do. He was the type who took your arm in slippery weather, or who held a restaurant chair for you, or who changed your flat tire on the road. And she needed him, now — needed him badly. Because if there were two men down at the intersection they had cut her off. "There's nothing to it," she explained easily. "All you do is ride up to Route Eight, look around, buy some gas or cigarettes, and come right back. Nobody would have reason to bother you. And I'll even pay you for your trouble. A hundred dollars."

"You don't think I'd take money?" he said. "I wouldn't think of —"

Of course he wouldn't take the money, she thought. It was a gambit she had used to put him on the defensive and to show him how desperate she was. "You probably think I'm some sort of criminal," she said. "I'm not. I swear it. These men are after me and I just have to get away."

His eyebrows lifted. "I could go back down the hill and call the police for you. There's a State Police barracks near here at Shelburne Falls."

"I wish I *could* call the police," she said earnestly. "But they can't help me. Look, it wouldn't take you more than half an hour. You'll be back before dark."

"I don't like to get mixed up with runaway wives or whatever —"

"Is *that* what worries you?" She laughed. "I'm not even married."

"Then why should these men — ?"

He was being a little stubborn, she thought. Now she would have to make up a plausible, pathetic story. Yet she must be careful not to overdo it. "I'll tell you everything — short and quick," she said. "My name is Louise Carter and I'm from Boston. When I was eighteen my father died and, because I was his favorite, he left most of his money to me. My older brother, George, was administrator until I turned twenty-one." She watched his face. She was twenty-five but men were such poor judges of a woman's age. "I turned twenty-one two weeks ago and George was supposed to turn over the money to me. Instead he went to court and said I was mentally incompetent. He

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wanted me put into a sanitarium for observation."

"But how could he do that?"

"Oh, he could," she said, thinking fast. "You see, when I was at Mount Holyoke College I had a nervous breakdown because I studied too hard. George told the court I had had trouble before. They decided to send me away for observation. I ran away. Now George is after me. He hired some private detectives to find me. You told me two men are down at the intersection. That means they've traced me to this area."

"But your own brother —" he said.

She had better soften it a little, she thought. "Oh, I'm not blaming George so much. He's a weakling. It's his greedy wife who's the real cause of it all. Once they get me into that sanitarium I'll never get out. I just know they'll bribe the doctors or something."

"I never heard of such a thing," he said. "Are you sure — ?"

So he wasn't completely gullible, she thought. It would be better to tone down the story a little more. "Maybe I'm making it worse than it is. I wouldn't want to take the chance, though. I can't fight them from the sanitarium. They have a commitment order, which means the police can't help me either. The only person in the world who can help me now is you."

He thought for a moment. "I guess there's no harm in it. You mean once you're away from here you'll be safe?"

"Oh, yes."

"I'll have to use your car."

"That's just the point. They'd recognize my car in a minute. Look, I have an idea. There's high-test gas in my tank. Can't you siphon it into yours?"

"Yes, if I had some rubber tubing."

"There's some garden hose. We could cut off a piece."

"Sure," he said. "That should do it."

He had been gone twenty-five minutes and she kept peering up the road, looking for his car. He might have become frightened and run, she thought; or he might have bumped into Eddie Stewart and his boys and they had asked questions . . . or he might have gone directly to the nearest phone and called the police.

No, she thought, if she had thought for a moment that he would go to the police, she would have shot him down without compunction. She knew men. Just because she was pretty and had innocent blue eyes didn't mean she was empty-headed. She, herself, had planned the whole thing from the beginning, hadn't she?

The first move had been to become secretary to Avery Malibar of Brookline. Malibar was a wealthy old bachelor, without any living kin — an eccentric collector of rare coins. He was in his middle seventies and she knew he wasn't going to live forever. She also knew that many wealthy old men left their fortunes to their nurses,

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housekeepers, or secretaries. It was a perfect setup — well, almost perfect. The pay had been small and Avery Malibar had begrudged doling it out every week. He was niggardly in every respect. He hadn't bought a new suit in twenty years. He had holes in his shoes and stuffed them with cardboard. He cut paper napkins in half to make them last twice as long. Petty things like that. But he was lavish with one thing — his coin collection. The big Victorian mansion he lived in had the finest vault and burglar alarm system, the most elaborate glass cabinets and velvet-lined numismatic cases. There was also Mike Cermak, the big husky watchman who lived on the premises.

For two years she had worked for Avery Malibar. She had been patient. Once the old man took ill and she thought the time had come. But he recovered. Then three weeks ago came the bad news that had spoiled everything. Avery Malibar had called her into the dusty library and had told her he had made out a new will. He was leaving all his money to some museum to care for his collection. One thousand dollars was to go to Mike Cermak. For her, in consideration of her loyalty and devotion, five hundred dollars.

She had been badly shaken, of course. It had taken all her restraint not to throttle the old fool then and there. Spending two years in that dirty old house — and all for a bequest of five hundred dollars! And even for that sum she would have to wait until he died. He would probably outlive her just for spite!

It meant an entirely new plan. She knew Avery Malibar kept about seventy thousand dollars in cash in the vault. All she needed was the vault combination and some outside help.

With a little patience and a bit of stealth she obtained the vault combination. The outside help she found a week later in a little bar on Huntington Avenue. He was a small-time hoodlum named Eddie Stewart, a good-looking young man with narrow, close-set eyes. Eddie had two men who would also help.

The plan, she told Eddie, depended on timing. The job had to be pulled on a Thursday night just after seven o'clock. That was the night when Cermak went to the supermarket to do the shopping for the week. He was usually gone about a half hour. She would give Eddie Stewart the vault combination in advance. Then she herself would shut off the burglar alarm and leave the outside gate unlocked. Eddie and his boys would come in, tie up both Avery Malibar and herself, and then rob the vault. Later she would meet Eddie in Providence, Rhode Island, and they would divide the money.

Eddie Stewart thought it was a very good plan. Of course, that wasn't the *entire* plan. Eddie was a fool if he thought she was going to split everything with him after she had done the really important work. As a matter of fact, Cermak usually left for the supermarket at six thirty in the eve-

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ning, not seven. As soon as Cermak left she would open the vault, take out sixty thousand dollars and hide it in the loft of the old barn. What Eddie would find in the vault was only ten thousand dollars. When she met him in Providence she would give him the big kiss-off. Could she help it if she had been mistaken? Was it her fault there was only ten thousand in the vault? Eddie would believe it. She never had any trouble making men believe her — that would be the easiest part. Then, after a respectable length of time, she could quit her job and leave with the sixty thousand dollars. No suspicion would fall on her. The police would still be looking for three men.

It was too bad her plan went wrong. She had no way of foretelling, of course, that Mr. Malibar would surprise her at the vault when she opened it at six thirty. He was usually in his room at that time. And she had no way of foretelling that Mr. Malibar would become so violent about it that she would have to kill him with her .32 automatic.

After that she improvised quickly. It was senseless to leave any money at all in the vault. When Eddie Stewart showed up at seven and found Mr. Malibar dead on the floor he would make tracks fast. So she had packed all the money in a suitcase, got into her car, and headed west.

In Fitchburg she stole a pair of license plates from a car in an all-night parking lot. When she got to Greenfield she found she needed gas. She had wrapped a bandanna over her blonde hair and put on a pair of dark sun glasses. It was easy. The gas-station attendant could not possibly recognize her.

She slept in the car the remainder of that night. In the morning she had gone into a diner for breakfast. There she heard two truck drivers talking about a State Police roadblock near the New York state line and how all cars were being checked. The police had no reason to know she was in this area, but it was best to lay low for a few days — just to make sure.

After breakfast she had gone to a local realtor and rented the cabin, staying in it all day. Then the stranger had come along in the green sedan and she learned from him of the two men down at the intersection. Somehow Eddie Stewart had picked up her trail but not her exact location.

Ten minutes more went by and now she was standing on the little open porch of the cabin, staring up the road in the fast-gathering twilight. No sign of him.

She went inside, locked her overnight case, then checked the automatic. She would give him five more minutes, she thought, no more. If he didn't show up by then she would leave on foot, abandoning the car. It would be best to keep off the nearby roads. With darkness coming soon there was no hope of cutting cross-country over the wooded hills. It would be better to take a blanket and stay in the woods until morning.

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With daylight she could strike north toward the Vermont border. On a secondary road she could pick up a ride from a passing motorist. An attractive girl had no trouble getting a ride.

The five minutes went by and she stood dry-mouthed on the porch, hating the very thought of going alone into the dark, eerie forest. Then she saw dust filtering up from the road. She darted back into the cabin, bolted the door, took out the automatic, and cocked it. She looked through the window and watched the green sedan as it came bumping along the dirt road. It stopped in front of the cabin and the tall stranger got out.

She opened the door a crack. "Anybody with you?" she called out.

He looked toward her in surprise. "No, of course not."

"You see anybody up there?"

"Not a soul. No cars — nothing."

"You're sure?"

"Positive."

Elation tingled through her. "What took you so long?"

"You wanted me to be careful, didn't you?"

She laughed delightedly because everything was working out fine. She opened the door wider as he came onto the porch and faced her. Delving into her handbag she brought out five twenty-dollar bills. "I wasn't making idle conversation about the hundred dollars. Here, and thanks."

"Keep it," he said. "I didn't do it for any hundred dollars."

Naturally, he wouldn't take the money, she thought. He was a hick all the way through. But the gesture on her part was just the right touch. She put the money away. "Funny," she said, "here we've been talking like old friends and I don't even know your name."

"I was waiting for you to ask," he said. "It's William Carpenter. But you can call me Bill."

"And what do you do for a living, Bill?"

"Watch salesman. Delphi watches. Swiss. But the parts are assembled here in the States."

"You carry samples?"

"About fifteen thousand dollars' worth. But not with me now."

"Why not?"

"I storage them over the weekends. No salesman rides around with his cases after working hours. Right now mine are in a jeweler's safe in North Adams." He smiled. "I planned to pick them up this morning. But it was a rough weekend. Now I'll have to wait until tomorrow."

"Then your trunk compartment is empty?"

"Yes. Why?"

She looked speculatively at the car. "It's a big compartment. I bet I could fit into it."

He didn't answer for a moment. His face was indistinct in the gathering darkness. Then, "Yes, I guess you could."

"I was going to have you drive me to the North Adams railroad station," she said. "But that wouldn't be any good. They'd be sure to watch the

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railroad station for me. I'd be much better off riding over the New York state line to Troy." She added quickly. "There's absolutely no risk in it for you and I'd make it worth your while."

"Isn't this getting a little complicated?" he asked.

She knew she would have to needle him a little, stab him where his type was most vulnerable. "Well, if you're scared, Bill —"

"Not scared," he said. "I want to make sure I'm not doing anything wrong — anything illegal."

"Oh, that? You won't be doing anything wrong. I have an uncle living in Troy, New York. That's who I've been trying to reach. He's an attorney. Once I'm over the line my brother can't touch me. Then my uncle and I can fight this thing in the courts. You understand?"

"Yes," he said doubtfully. "I guess so."

"But in order to get there I have to slip by George. You could drive me in your car, Bill."

He still looked doubtful. He wasn't too long on guts, she thought. She'd have to soft-talk him a little. She plucked at his sleeve. "If you leave me here they'll come and lock me up. Could you go off and allow that to happen, Bill?"

"I wouldn't like to," he said. "Let me take you as far as North Adams. You can catch a bus to Troy from there. That would help, wouldn't it?"

"All right," she said, making it sound reluctant. One thing at a time, she thought. Once she got to North Adams she'd have no trouble persuading him to take her over the state line. "Wait here, Bill. I'll get my things."

When she came out of the cabin it was full darkness. He was looking up at the star-studded sky. Her hair was wrapped in a flowered bandanna. Over her arm she carried her handbag and a coat.

"Don't you have any baggage?" he asked her.

"Oh, this is only a trial run," she said. "If you get beyond the intersection without being stopped by anybody, we'll know we're perfectly safe. Then we can turn around and come back."

"Come back?" he asked. "Once you're away, why do you want to come back?"

"Just to make absolutely sure there's no trap." She smiled and patted his hand. "I know it sounds awfully confusing, but I'll explain later." She opened her handbag. "Here's a gun. You may need it in an emergency."

He took the pearl-handled automatic gingerly. "Where did you get this?"

"It belonged to my father. I've had it for years."

He put the pistol in his jacket pocket. "I'm not going to fire it, Louise. When it comes to violence I draw the line. I'm telling you that now."

It took all her effort not to laugh at him. "Of course you're not going

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to shoot it. If you just point it, you can scare anybody away."

He opened the trunk compartment of the car. She folded the coat and put it inside. Then she climbed in, curled up, and rested her head on the coat. She smiled. "All comfy."

He let the lid down. "I'm not locking it — so you can lift it from time to time and get some air. How is it?"

"Good," she said, her voice muffled from inside.

She lay in the trunk, her head on the coat, her legs tucked in under her, one hand holding onto the spare tire. The rear wheels ground and vibrated under her and she was jarred and thrown about. Once the car stopped for a moment and in the blackness she fumbled for her handbag before she remembered she had given the gun to Bill Carpenter. But the car started again and turned. Now, beneath her, the wheels hummed smoothly and steadily, and she knew they had reached the main highway. She waited for him to turn off and stop. He didn't. The car kept going. She felt a surge of terror in her throat.

The car made one turn after another, took a sudden swerve, then screeched over gravel and stopped. She heard Carpenter get out. She groped for the tire iron — any kind of weapon. The trunk lid opened.

"Where are we?" she asked hoarsely.

"Take a look," he said. He helped her crawl out. She looked around. They were in a parking lot. A yellow neon sign said *Ollie's Steak House.*

"You fool!" She almost screamed it at him. "What are you trying to do?"

"We're going to have some dinner. I've been here lots of times before. It's over the city line in North Adams."

"But George —" she started to say.

"George wouldn't find it in a million years. Only the townspeople and a few salesmen know about this place. It's on the road to Savoy."

"Give me the gun, please," she said.

"You sure you want it back, Louise?"

"Give it to me," she said sternly. "You don't have a permit. If the police find it on you you'd be in trouble."

He handed her the automatic and she promptly put it in her handbag. She walked around the parking lot examining the cars. "We have to be careful," she said. "George is smart."

When she came to the entrance of the restaurant, she said, "Wait." Going over to the window she stood on her toes and peered inside.

"Recognize anybody?" he asked.

"No." She brushed her clothes and smoothed her hair. "Let's go in, dear. I'll let you buy me the biggest steak they have."

They walked in. A matronly woman beamed at them and said, "Good evening, Mr. Carpenter."

"Hi, Mrs. Olafson," he said. "The end booth, please."

"There'll be a little wait for it, Mr. Carpenter," the woman said.

"That's okay. We'll be at the bar."

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It was her third drink and she was beginning to feel a little giggly and light-headed. She turned and regarded him with affection. He was really very good-looking, she thought. And his naïveness was a refreshing and pleasant change from the others. She really got a kick out of him.

"I'm almost drunk," she said to him. "You're making me very gay."

"I wouldn't want you to get drunk," he said seriously.

She smiled and lifted her glass to him. "You're sweet, Bill."

He grinned back and lifted his own glass in salute. Just then Mrs. Olafson came and told them their booth was ready . . .

He ordered two steaks. When the waitress left he lit a cigarette for her and said, "What were we talking about, Louise?"

"Nothing special." She looked at him archly, her eyes heavy-lidded. "Are you going to take me to Troy, Bill?"

He grinned. "I suppose I'll never get rid of you otherwise. You sure you'll be safe from your brother George there?"

"Oh, yes — perfectly safe."

"And what are you going to do about Avery Malibar?"

She stared across at him, her face suddenly turning numb. For the first time she noticed his eyes. They were a pale brown, but hard and cold. "What am I going to do about *who?*"

"Avery Malibar," he said without expression.

She took up her glass and drank. "I don't understand what you're saying."

"I'll make it clearer. Your name isn't Louise Carter — it's Mary Louise Gregory. And a man named Avery Malibar was murdered in Brookline yesterday. Who were you trying to kid, Mary?"

She reached unsteadily to the seat beside her, slipping her hand into the leather bag, her fingers closing over the automatic.

He said, "Don't do anything stupid like grabbing for the gun. I could have taken you any time." He pulled aside the top of his jacket, showing a shoulder holster with a revolver in it. "You see what I mean, Mary?"

"Yes," she said, wetting her lips with her tongue. Confidence pulsated back into her because now she knew what he was and what he wanted. "You played it real smart, Bill."

"Did I?"

"Sure. You're in with Eddie Stewart. He sent you up the road to look around. You found me. You could have gone back and told him. The point is, you didn't."

He smiled. "Why didn't I, Mary?"

"Because, darling, you knew you could make a better deal with me."

"You mean cross up Eddie Stewart?"

"With all your educated talk you're nothing but one of his hired hands, Bill. You know that. He called you in from out of town for a job that had to be split four ways. Now the big pay-off is just for the two of us. It's the once-in-a-lifetime job your kind

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wait for. That's where you were smart, Bill. You were so smart you really had me fooled."

"Then I did better than you, Mary. That corny story you told wouldn't fool anybody."

"I had to make it up quick, Bill — I was desperate. Now listen," she said impatiently, "I'll be honest with you. All our cards are on the table, face up. We'll really go to Troy where we can make plane connections for Texas. From Texas to Mexico. The two of us. A fifty-fifty split on everything."

"And what's everything?"

"The contents of the vault. I didn't count it all yet. But I know there must be at least seventy thousand dollars."

"Where is it now?"

"I've got it," she said coyly. "I have to know if we're partners first. Or are you still working for Eddie Stewart?"

"If I was working for Stewart I'd have taken you an hour ago. Now let's get a little truth from you for a change. Why did you doublecross Eddie?"

"What difference does it make?"

"You might try it again — this time on me."

"No, this is different. You're taking the risk with me. Eddie wasn't taking any risk."

"He planned the whole job with you, didn't he?"

"He's a liar. *I* planned it. And I did all the ground work. All Eddie had to do was walk in and scoop up the money. Then I got to thinking. How did I know Eddie wouldn't take the loot and run off with it? I'd have no comeback, would I?"

"Keep talking."

"What's the use of rehashing it?" she snapped. "You can guess what happened. I went down to the vault before Eddie came. I began putting the money into my suitcase when Avery Malibar walked in on me. He was like a maniac. I had to kill him. There was no other way."

"With your cute little pearl-handled automatic."

"Yes."

"If you were so clever, why didn't you ditch the gun?"

"Oh, I will, don't worry. Just as soon as we're in the clear, I'll get rid of it. In the meantime I might still need it."

"It was a nasty little trick you pulled. You cleaned out the vault and left Eddie to walk in on a dead body."

She smiled. "He was due at seven. I could have made it worse by tipping off the cops — but I didn't. I gave Eddie a chance to get out."

"It was real decent of you," he said.

"Now you're being sarcastic," she said reproachfully.

"Where's the loot?"

"Buried in the woods."

"So that was the idea of the trial run. You weren't taking any chances with me."

"Frankly, I wasn't. If you weren't on the level and we ran into an ambush at the road intersection, I still had a bargaining point with Eddie.

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Why? Because I have the loot, darling, and he doesn't. Well, there was no ambush. So now I trust you." She drew deeply on her cigarette. "You're in this with me, aren't you, Bill — just the two of us?"

"All the way," he said.

She winked at him. "I told you you were smart, Bill."

To be on the safe side, she still rode in the trunk compartment, taking the jolts with stoic calm. It wasn't going to be too bad, she thought, pressing her fingers against the outline of the automatic in her bag. She would get rid of Carpenter when the proper time came. He wasn't to be fooled as easily as Stewart, but she would find a way. Perhaps when they got to Texas. Perhaps even before . . .

In the woods she focused the flashlight on the ground. He brushed away the pine needles. Using a trowel he dug up the heavy suitcase. Under the light he opened it, his fingers riffling through the jumbled sheaves of bills.

"You didn't bury it deep," he said. "We'd have found it."

"I had trouble with the roots of the trees," she said.

He snapped shut the locks on the suitcase, stood up and wiped his face. "There's one thing I don't understand. All this time you've been afraid only of Eddie Stewart. What about the cops?"

She laughed. "Silly. How would they have the slightest idea where I was?"

"You drove west from Brookline. Along the way you stole a pair of license plates, didn't you? That would be reported, Mary."

"Forget it. We're using your car now. I'm going to leave mine here. They won't find it for weeks."

"I wouldn't be so sure," he said. "What about gas? You had to stop somewhere to fill your tank. If I was a cop I'd check all the gas stations along the way."

"I wore a bandanna and dark glasses. You getting a little nervous, Bill?"

"At night dark glasses stick out like a sore thumb. If you stopped for gas in Greenfield the attendant would remember it."

"Greenfield?" she whispered, her voice suddenly harsh. "How did you know I stopped at Greenfield?"

"Then this morning," he continued, "you rented this cabin. If I was a cop I'd check the real estate agents in this area just to make sure you didn't get by the roadblocks. Then after I located you, I'd come along and stall my car near the cabin."

"You would?" she asked gently, shutting off the flashlight and dropping it to the ground. "Why?"

"Because the Brookline Police weren't sure you killed Malibar," he said in the darkness. "Malibar was found dead of a gunshot wound and you had disappeared. There were the questions of the weapon and the money. Both had to be located."

"Go on," she said, her voice squeezed tight.

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"Then there are tape recorders," he said matter-of-factly. "If a cop can get a suspect into a restaurant, he can have a mike planted in the lamp on the booth table and run the wire into the kitchen."

"Yes," she said, opening her bag. She slipped her hand in and curled her fingers around the butt of the pistol. "And it had to be rigged up in advance, in a particular booth," she went on. "So the cop waits at the bar with his suspect until everything is ready. After he's in the booth he leads the conversation around to the murder. So it's all recorded for evidence."

"Yes, it was really very simple," he said.

"And those two men you said were at the bottom of the hill. That was pure fiction, of course."

"No," he said, his voice flat and toneless. "But they weren't Eddie and one of his boys. They were state troopers. There was also a man above here with a pair of binoculars. He watched you all afternoon. State Police all around you, Mary."

"And you're one of them, Bill."

"Yes," he said expressionlessly.

There was no use trying to soft-talk this one, she thought. She slipped the automatic out of the bag, cocked it, and pointed it at him. "Don't move."

But he did move toward her. "I'll take the gun back," he said. "You didn't think I'd return it to you loaded, did you?"

Without hope she stepped back and squeezed the trigger. There was an empty click. His hand came out swiftly and took the pistol away from her.

She laughed inanely. "And all the time I was worried about Eddie Stewart. Where *is* Eddie?"

"I don't know," he said with cold candor. "But if it happened the way you say it did, I imagine he doesn't want any part of you. Eddie must be badly scared and running fast." He picked up the suitcase and the flashlight. Snapping on the light, he turned it toward the road and blinked it three times.

"You had every little thing prepared, didn't you?" she asked.

"Your arrest by itself wouldn't have been enough." He paused. Above them a car started and a pair of headlights suddenly illuminated the road. As the car moved toward them its blue police blinker flashed off and on.

"We had to have evidence to bring into court."

"I almost got away with it," she said. "It was that close."

"In this business," he said, "close doesn't count."

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EQMM's DETECTIVE DIRECTORY

edited by ROBERT P. MILLS

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CRIME FOR TWO *edited by FRANCES & RICHARD LOCKRIDGE* (LIPPINCOTT, $3.)	". . . solid professional quality . . . skillfully contrived entertainment." (AB)	". . . better than average collection . . . best Mystery Writers collection to date." (FC)

AB: *Anthony Boucher in the New York Times*

FC: *Frances Crane in the Evansville Press*

SC: *Sergeant Cuff in The Saturday Review*

VD: *Violet Dewey in the Milwaukee Journal*

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Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine rounds up the judgment of reviewers across the country. The key at bottom gives sources.

THE RIDDLE OF SAMSON *by ANDREW GARVE* (HARPER, $2.75)	"Amusing, eerie, excellent atmosphere and entertainment." (FC)	". . . lively, swift-moving drama . . . charming and unusual background . . ." (H-M)
THE CASE OF THE NERVOUS ACCOMPLICE *by ERLE STANLEY GARDNER* (MORROW, $2.75)	". . . as fast, intricate and fascinating as any Gardner fan expects." (AB)	". . . usual excellent courtroom battles and bombshells." (VD)
SCORPION REEF *by CHARLES WILLIAMS* (MACMILLAN, $2.75)	". . . a grand thriller, with tensely shifting suspicion . . ." (AB)	". . . we recommend . . . highly." (H-M)
TRICK OR TREAT *by DORIS MILES DISNEY* (CRIME CLUB, $2.75)	"Very entertaining." (FC)	"As usual . . . a simple, direct, workmanlike job. Admirable." (AdV)
TOP ASSIGNMENT *by GEORGE HARMON COXE* (KNOPF, $2.75)	"Exciting and neatly plotted." (FC)	". . . pace fair to good; author's 35th. Plus mark." (SC)
THE CASE OF THE THREE LOST LETTERS *by CHRISTOPHER BUSH* (MACMILLAN, $2.75)	". . . a trite and incompetent puzzle . . ." (AB)	"Population large . . . well-paced job. Amiably complex." (SC)
NOW I LAY ME DOWN TO DIE *by ELIZABETH TEBBETTS-TAYLOR* (ARCADIA, $2.50)	"Style not unpleasant and characters thoroughly forgettable. C minus." (LGO)	"Setting convincing; wispy in spots, and improvable, but holds interest." (SC)

H-M: *Brett Halliday and Helen McCloy in the Fairfield County Fair*

LGO: *Lenore Glen Offord in the San Francisco Chronicle*

AdV: *Avis de Voto in the Boston Globe*

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The **Big Man** *hires a small-town private eye . . .*
strictly à la **Black Mask**

7. STRICTLY FROM HOLLYWOOD

by STEVE APRIL

THIS BEEFY JOKER WAS BUSY SHAKing me awake. I looked at his ugly face and thought it was all a nightmare. The guy flashed a badge and growled, "Get your clothes on, Bogart." He really growled.

"What is this?" I said, sitting up and looking at my wrist watch. It was almost 2 in the morning.

"Got some business for you," the cop said. "Ain't that something, a real cop bringing business to a crummy private eye like you? On your feet, Cagney."

"Take it slow. What's —?"

"You Charlie Dalls, private detective?"

"Yeah. So what?"

"A certain friend of mine has work for you — *now* — so get dressed and stop beating your gums. I ain't got much use for you private bloodhounds."

I was wide-awake, but I still didn't know what it was all about. Buster had a badge — a good one, obviously official — and he looked far too big and stupid to argue with. As I dressed, he sat in a chair and said, "You can't be doing so hot. This hotel is a fleabag."

"I'm from Iowa," I said. "Don't even have a license to work in New York. I just got in from Europe."

"Don't worry about a license; nobody'll bother you. On a case in Europe?"

"Yeah," I said.

"All the way to Europe — you must of got big dough."

"Just my expenses."

Bully boy shook his potato-head. "So what you get out of the deal?"

"Trip to Europe, chance to travel," I said.

He grinned, or maybe it was a sneer. "You private eyes! Strictly for the comic books."

He had a prowl car waiting. When we got into the car, I asked where we were going, and he grunted, "See your client; he's in jail. Why he wants to bother with a yokel like you beats me, but that's how he wants it."

"Who is 'he'?"

"George Walker — The Big Man himself."

I suppose my mouth dropped open, or should have. Walker was a well-known gambler, a big wheel in a lot of machines. It had been whispered that he was on the boat, but I'd never seen him. He was traveling first class.

Walker wasn't in a cell. He was in

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the office of the precinct captain, sitting in the captain's chair, his feet up on an open drawer. He was a large man, plump, everything about him smooth and expensive except his voice. That was brittle. "You come in on the *Corsair* yesterday?" he asked me.

"Yeah," I said. I almost said, "Yes, sir."

"Remembered seeing your name and occupation in the ship's paper. Here's the pitch: Another passenger, a Franklin Allen, was killed in his apartment here in New York a few hours after we all left the boat yesterday afternoon. The cops think somebody on the ship did it, and they're holding me because they got a crazy idea I may have had a motive: we gambled, and he welshed. I'm hiring you because you know most of the people on the ship and that gives you a start over any other dick."

"Did you play cards with him?"

"Sure, but not for real dough. Forget me, I don't murder people. That's for punks. I got to get out of this fast. I'm coming up before one of those investigating committees in a couple days; don't want no bad publicity. That's why this has to be cleaned up fast." He took out his wallet and carefully placed ten hundred-dollar bills on the desk. "There's your retainer. Give me speed, and you get a couple grand more."

I picked up the long green slowly. "What makes the cops think one of the ship's passengers did the killing?"

"Because Allen was a retired professor, the quiet type," my buddy, the copper, put in. "And he'd been out of the country for over three years, Bellamy." He was watching the money in my hand with greedy eyes.

Walker said, "Show me fast action and — I won't forget you."

"I'd like to see Allen's apartment," I said.

The cop cut me off with a harsh laugh. "Thought you'd solve it without getting out of your chair." Turning to Walker, he said, "He's a movie dick. All these private eyes think they are. He —"

Walker glanced at him, and the copper stopped talking. Walker said, "Get going."

I followed the fat copper out the door. I didn't have the smallest idea of what I was going to do. Falling into this deal cold was rough enough; I was way over my head. I was just a small-town detective, never handled anything bigger than divorce or skip-tracing before. Walker was Mr. Big; Walker meant an office in New York — if I could solve this.

In the car the cop started needling me again. My buddy didn't like me because if I made it, I'd be one more joker Walker would be carrying. There'd be less gravy for the others, and I'd be playing it legitimate, too. *If* I made it. . . . Still, at the moment, I was Walker's boy with his grand hot in my pocket, so I tried an experiment: I turned to the copper and said, "You got a noisy mouth."

It worked. I didn't collect a faceful of fist.

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Franklin Allen's apartment was in one of those modest residential hotels off Central Park West. From the desk clerk I learned that Allen had cabled from Paris the month before for a two-room apartment. The rooms were neat and conservatively furnished. The detective on duty stared at me and growled, "Who's this?"

"Don't you recognize George Raft?" my copper said with a false smile. "He's a private dick working for Mr. Walker."

The body had been removed, but the detective told me Allen had been beaten to death with two blows from a blunt instrument, probably a hunk of pipe. The killer had cleaned himself up in the bathroom; there were traces of blood in the washbasin. The murder had taken place in the bedroom, as Allen was unpacking, and since he had let the killer in, it meant Allen had known him, or her.

I nodded and looked around. Something about the bathroom bothered me, but I didn't know what. "Can I see another bathroom on this floor?"

"What for, Powell — or is it Ladd? Same maid does them all. Okay, come on, we'll look."

When we returned to Allen's apartment I said, "Find out if the guys at customs were expecting a shipment of diamonds, or maybe dope, coming in on the boat. Oh, and arrest Allen's cabin steward; he did the murder."

My buddy stared at me with hard eyes. "Just like that? You kidding?"

"What's the steward's name?" the detective asked.

"How the devil should I know?" I asked, heading for the door. "But arrest him. Walker — Mr. Walker — doesn't like jails."

It was starting to get light, about 7 o'clock, when Walker shook my eager hands, pressed into them a lot of hundred-buck bills, and told me, "Charlie, forget about leaving New York. After I get some sleep, we'll have a long talk. What an angle that steward had, slipping a package of dope in Allen's bag, the old gent taking it through customs, without even knowing he was in the act, and the steward in the clear all the way."

"He didn't have to be a genius. It was a small package, and remember he had access to Allen's luggage all the way over," I said.

Walker shrugged. "Only mistake he made was Allen's catching him going through the bag in the apartment. How did you figure it?"

I should have told them that it was a lucky guess, remembering that stewards on the ships are sent to school where they learn to clean all cabins just so. When I saw the hand towels in Allen's bathroom folded and hung diagonally, they reminded me of the ship. Force of habit made the steward fold the towels like that after washing his bloody hands.

But I simply couldn't help looking my beefy pal, the cop, straight in the eye and saying softly, "It was a cinch. Merely figured what Humphrey Bogart would do in a spot like that — and I did it!"

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PRIZE-WINNING STORY

David Alexander, author of TERROR ON BROADWAY *and* SHOOT A SITTING DUCK, *knows his New York City — its honest folk and its mobsters, its "guys and dolls." And no wonder: for ten years Mr. Alexander was an editor and columnist on the oldest theatrical and sports daily in America, the "Morning Telegraph" of New York. And as if to copper-rivet his first-hand knowledge of cops, Mr. Alexander took a thirteen-week course at the New York Institute of Criminology. As a result of having attained highest honors, in a class which included policemen and private investigators, Mr. Alexander was offered two positions as a private eye and one as a house detective with a large hotel chain. But Mr. Alexander, God bless him, has only one vocational love — writing.*

In his first story for EQMM, the author gives us a memorable character — Kevin McCarty, lay brother in a Jesuit seminary, a man seemingly dedicated to gentleness and peace and a spiritual life, but who came to realize that he had a mission to perform in the world of cruelty and violence that surrounded him. This is frankly a story of sentiment, with a deep sense of morality that cynical or sophisticated readers might find rather old-fashioned; but perhaps it will do our hearts good to be reminded, in these soft-fibered days, of old-fashioned morality — and the courage that goes with it.

8. THE GENTLEST OF THE BROTHERS

by DAVID ALEXANDER

KEVIN MCCARTY WAS A LAY brother at the seminary, happily pruning rosebushes in the institution's gardens, when word arrived that his young sister, Rose Kathleen, had died by her own hand with mortal sin upon her soul. The death alone was a tragic thing, but even more terrible were the letter and package that Kevin McCarty received on the first day of the laying-out. The letter and package were addressed by Rose Kathleen's own hand, the same hand that had lifted the deadly poison to her pretty mouth.

Poor Kevin read the letter over many times and it was a long and shocking message his sister had written down and mailed, along with the package, just before she took her life. Kevin had believed that Rose Kath-

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leen, the last relative he had in all the world since his mother's death, was an actress in the theater. He did not quite approve of her occupation, but after all it was honest work and she was young and radiant and a pretty thing to see, and there was no real harm in letting people look at her there behind the footlights, for no one was ever hurt by looking upon radiance and beauty. But Rose Kathleen had not really been an actress, it seemed. She had been a "dancer." The quotation marks were her own. She had appeared in specialty numbers at Rory O'Bannon's night club called The Fig Leaf and her letter said that "dancers" there hardly danced at all but stood with blue light on them and bared their bodies before the drunken customers. Also, after hours, the "dancers" were forced to entertain the customers who had the wherewithal to pay them for their favors. Rose Kathleen had done it all because in some unaccountable way she had fallen in love with Rory O'Bannon.

Kevin McCarty knew Rory O'Bannon all too well. He had grown up on the same twisting street in Greenwich Village with him. Even as a youth Rory had been a bully, an oversized lad with a wild light in his eyes and a tangled mop of red, curly hair. When they were kids, Kevin McCarty would never fight back when Rory O'Bannon attacked him. This was not because Kevin was frail and undersized and often sickly. He had courage enough. But he could not stand violence and it was impossible for him to strike a blow that might hurt a living thing. That is why he had sought the peace and spiritual life that the brotherhood offered.

The crooked bone in Kevin's thin nose was the result of a beating Rory O'Bannon had given him for no reason at all one day when he was walking home from St. Ignatius's Parochial School. Sometimes, when the weather changed, Kevin's left arm pained him. Long ago Rory O'Bannon had twisted the arm behind his back and when Kevin had refused to say his mother was a word that the bully tried to make him say, the arm had snapped.

Kevin McCarty was not so far removed from the world outside the stone walls of the seminary that he did not read the newspapers and occasionally listen to the radio. He knew what Rory O'Bannon had become. The police had arrested Rory many times and crime commissions had questioned him as often, but only once had he been sent to jail. That time they had found a deadly weapon on his person. They said that Rory O'Bannon was a right bower of Martello, who headed the Syndicate, and that he dealt in such unsavory commodities as narcotics and prostitution. But when they questioned him, Rory stood on his constitutional rights and refused to answer, or stated he was a good citizen because he paid his taxes, and all they had against him, really, was that he owned a night club of questionable repute.

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The undressing in blue light and the entertaining of Rory's customers after hours were not the worst things Rose Kathleen told of in her letter. She had lived with Rory O'Bannon for a while, it seemed, in the way that only a wife should live with a man. When Rory had grown tired of her, she had taken to the drugs her mobster peddled. Soon she was not even fit to earn her living as a "dancer." She had to have the stuff, she said, so she sold the only thing she had to sell to get it. Finally she could stand the life she led no longer and had drunk the poison, and thus had added another sin to her poor young soul that had so many scars already.

In the package that came with the letter Kevin found a diary written in his little sister's childish scrawl. She had kept it while she lived with Rory O'Bannon and she had listed names and dates and places concerning the sale of narcotics and other illegal transactions. The name of Martello appeared in the diary many times. Rose Kathleen had thought the information in the little book might enable Kevin to see that Rory O'Bannon and his dynasty of corruption were destroyed.

After Rose Kathleen's funeral, Kevin McCarty appeared before Father Francis, the seminary's rector, and told him of the contents of the letter and the diary. Father Francis had known Kevin's family and the neighborhood in which they lived for many years. He said, "You must send the letter and the diary to Danny Meighan, my son. He grew up next door to you and he was your boyhood friend. I think he loved your little sister, too. Danny is a detective now, you know."

Kevin McCarty shook his head. "I will see Danny, Father. That much I intend. But Danny cannot make Rory O'Bannon die for his sins, and die he must. It is I who must see that Rory O'Bannon dies. It is that I have come to tell you, Father. I must renounce my vows and go back into the world."

The old priest gazed unbelievingly at the frail young man whose pale skin never seemed to brown under the sun of the gardens. "Your vows . . ." the old priest said.

"The Jesuit vows of obedience and poverty," Kevin McCarty replied. "I am poor enough in both wealth and resource, Father. And I am obedient in a way you can never understand. I am obedient to the thing within me that says Rory O'Bannon must die."

"The devil's counsel," Father Francis said.

"I freely confess it is the devil and not Our Blessed Saviour that has possessed me," Kevin McCarty answered. "But to see that Rory O'Bannon dies is my mission and I cannot shirk it. I do not wish to blaspheme, Father, but I say that some men are too vile and evil for the Lord in His kindness and forgiveness to contend with. The devil is the only match for the likes of Rory O'Bannon."

"My son," said Father Francis,

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"your shock and grief are great and your mind is unhinged. Do you realize that you are telling me, in effect, that you plan to murder Rory O'Bannon?"

"Rory O'Bannon must die," Kevin McCarty repeated stubbornly.

The old priest shook his head and smiled. "No, my son," he said. "I do not fear for you. You are the gentlest of all the brothers. You are one of the gentlest men who has walked the earth since our Saviour died upon the Cross. I have no fear for you, I say. This mood will pass. You could not kill. You could not inflict hurt upon any living thing. Go, if you must, but I will make no report to the Father Provincial as yet. I have abiding faith you will return."

"I am going out into the world again, Father," Kevin McCarty said. "Rory O'Bannon must die, and I am the one who must see to it."

Kevin McCarty left the seminary wearing wrinkled, outmoded clothes and carrying as luggage only the letter and the diary.

His most urgent problem was to find a temporary means of earning his food and lodging while he set about his more important business. He was almost completely naïve, so the problem did not worry him at all. When he was a boy he had delivered groceries for his father's friends, the Gilberto brothers, and later he had clerked in their delicatessen store on Bleecker Street. He would simply go to the Gilbertos and ask for his old job back again. He needed very little in the way of money.

He found the old store the same as it had always been, long and narrow and darkish and redolent of aging cheese and spicy peppers. The Gilbertos — Jacomo, Harry, and Charley — were the same, too, only older. They were garrulous, kindly, devoted to their business. The deer head was still hanging there upon the wall. All the Gilbertos were hunters. Kevin's father had sometimes accompanied them on hunting trips to upstate New York and New Jersey and as far away as Canada. The oldest brother, Jacomo, had shot the deer whose head hung on the wall. It was dusty and mangy-looking now and one of the antlers had been broken somehow. The deer's head with the accusing glass eyes had always sickened Kevin McCarty.

The three Gilberto brothers greeted Kevin effusively. At first they could not believe he had given up the religious life or that he really wanted his old job back. When they were convinced, they gave him a job as clerk readily enough, apologizing for the salary they could afford to pay. "We are growing old, the three of us," said Charley. "The hours are long. We can use a little help."

Kevin found a furnished one-room flat almost directly across the street from the store. The room was on the second-floor, in the front of the house, and he could sit by the window and watch the trucks and cars and push-carts and the milling Irish and Italians

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on the street. In the distance he could see the old church where he had made his first communion.

It took him a week or so to orient himself and to formulate his plan for the killing of Rory O'Bannon.

The Gilberto brothers agreed that Kevin should open the store each morning at 8 and they gave him a key. At 10, Jacomo came in to help, then later Harry arrived, and finally Charley, who kept the store open until 10 at night. Kevin left at 5 as a rule, but if there was a rush, he often stayed on until well past dinner time. He ate at neighborhood hash counters and was never entirely conscious of what food he had ordered. Sometimes he forgot to eat at all and would be surprised when he awakened in the middle of the night with hunger pangs in his stomach.

He called the Mercer Street Station and found that Detective Danny Meighan was working the 4 to midnight shift that week. One evening he dropped around to see his friend. Danny took him to a little private office off the detective squad room where they could be alone.

They exchanged reminiscences of their boyhood on the Greenwich Village streets and in the paved playground behind St. Ignatius's School. Finally they spoke of Rose Kathleen, whom Danny Meighan had loved when he was very young, and, inevitably, of Rory O'Bannon.

"I knew she had taken up with him while you were away with the Fathers," Danny said. "I tried to stop her in my blundering, stupid way, but it did no good, no good at all. I thought of writing to you, but I doubted it would help and I was afraid it would only worry you, spoil the quiet and holy life you led. When young girls get like that there's no accounting for it. It's a certain kind of craziness, I guess. I see a lot just like her in my job. The worse the man is, the tighter hold he seems to get over young girls like Rose Kathleen."

Kevin McCarty said, "Suppose, just suppose now, Danny, that a young girl who went with a man like Rory O'Bannon kept a diary. Suppose she named names and listed places where drugs were sold and unlawful things were done. If the police had such a document, could they take action?"

Danny Meighan's eyes narrowed. "Are you trying to tell me, Kevin-boy, that your sister left such a diary?"

"Now, now, Danny," Kevin McCarty answered. "It's a game of just-suppose, like we used to play when we were kids. You were brought up by the Jesuits yourself. You should know their propensity for arguing and speculating upon abstract propositions."

"Abstract, is it?" asked the young detective. "Well, Kevin-boy, if you've got evidence of the sort that's concrete and not abstract, you'd best give it to the police without further argument or speculation about abstractions."

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Kevin shook his head. "The man of action," he said. "Tell me, now. If I gave you such a little book, what would happen, Danny?"

"The police would investigate all the persons named and raid all the addresses mentioned. Given sufficient grounds, they would make arrests."

"And what would happen to the men after they were arrested?"

"They would go to trial, of course. The diary you mention might prove valuable as substantiating evidence."

"What would be their punishment?"

Danny Meighan chuckled. "None of your Jesuit tricks," he warned. "If they were guilty and the police case was presented properly, the jury would convict and the judge would sentence them."

"What would be the sentence?" the frail man persisted.

The detective shrugged. "Who knows? Ten years, perhaps. More likely five."

Kevin McCarty said, "It's not enough. Rory O'Bannon is our own age, about. He'd still be young enough when he got out of prison to ruin more young girls, to sell more narcotics to high school kids. A man like Rory O'Bannon should be condemned to die."

Danny Meighan was startled. "You say that?" he asked. "A gentle soul like you who would never hurt a fly? But you're right, of course, and I agree entirely. There have been several bills drawn up to make the sale of narcotics a capital crime carrying the death penalty, but none of them has passed."

Kevin McCarty rose. "It's been good to see you," he said. "I'm sorry to have taken up your time with suppositional matters. But Rory O'Bannon must die. I'm determined that he must."

The detective looked even more amazed.

"Wait, now, my gentle friend," he said. "Are you telling me that you'll take the law in your own two hands and go gunning for O'Bannon your own self? I must warn you, then, that the killing of even a louse-bit rat like Rory would be murder under the law."

Kevin McCarty nodded. His face was very serious. "I know," he answered. "If I stumble across something less — abstract — I may call upon you again, Danny."

"Do that," said Danny Meighan. "And be careful, Kevin-lad. The likes of Rory O'Bannon are a bit too tough for Jesuit brothers who grow flowers and ponder on abstractions."

Kevin McCarty was no detective but he had little trouble in finding Rory O'Bannon's address. During the crime investigations the papers had made much of Rory's fancy penthouse on the park. For two nights after work Kevin watched the apartment entrance from a park bench, feeding crumbs to the pigeons from a bag he had brought along, but he failed to see anyone who resembled Rory in the slightest. On the third night he left the store earlier and took

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up his post before he ate his dinner. His vigil was rewarded. A bulky man with a brash face and unruly red hair fringing the hatbrim of his homburg swaggered out of the glass and chromium entrance of the apartment building, flanked on each side by blank-faced men whose shoulders were ridiculously padded and whose hats appeared a size too large. The three entered a waiting limousine as black and shiny as a hearse. Kevin had not seen Rory since the young bully had gone away to reform school, but he had no trouble recognizing him. The papers had been filled with O'Bannon's pictures. Rory had grown much taller and his middle had widened to a paunch, but the wild, cruel look on his face was just the same as always. For a solid week of nights Kevin watched and fed the pigeons. Each night Rory and the blank-faced men and the big car that looked like a hearse appeared. Rory's routine seemed as well established as any respectable citizen's. His schedule varied only by minutes from night to night.

Kevin McCarty felt no qualms about ending his evening watch. The pigeons were plump to the point of exploding, for many others fed them, too. Kevin McCarty knew where to find Rory O'Bannon when he wanted him.

On the second Sabbath after his return to the world of noise and haste and evil men, Kevin took a bus to the quiet village on the Hudson where the seminary was located. Priests are ordinary men, and like ordinary men, they have their hobbies. Father Francis's hobby was photography. He had a camera with a variety of lenses and filters and he had fitted out a large closet as a dark room. He had filled albums with his photographs of the fathers and the seminarians and the brothers at their work and studies and devotions. He had taken a great fancy to the gentle brother, Kevin McCarty, and had taught him the elements of such matters as shutter-speeds and f.-stops.

Father Francis was overjoyed on that sunny Sabbath afternoon when Kevin McCarty walked into his study that was filled with bright plaster saints who brooded on dark rows of books. He thought a prodigal brother had returned and although he doubted his ability to find a fatted calf on such short notice, he was fully prepared to open the best tinned delicacies in the seminary kitchen in celebration. When he found that Kevin had not returned to the fold for good, but only came to borrow his camera and use his dark room, Father Francis's lined face fell.

"And what of your crazy fixation about this O'Bannon?" he asked.

"I've seen him several times but only from a distance," Kevin replied evasively.

The mystified old man granted Kevin permission to use his photographic equipment, although he felt a strange premonition that the camera and developers might be used for Satan's work.

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Kevin had brought the diary along with him. He photographed several pages that he had marked in advance. He developed the negatives and hung the prints up on a rack to dry before Father Francis's small electric fan.

While he was waiting for the prints to dry he had a glass of wine with the old man and told him of the Gilberto brothers and their kindness and of Danny Meighan. He avoided mentioning the prints he had made or his dead sister or Rory O'Bannon. Later, when the prints were dry, he put them in an envelope, pocketed the envelope, and bade the old priest farewell.

Father Francis pressed Kevin's arm. "My son," he said, "leave God's work to God. I have made no report of you to the Father Provincial as yet."

"Rory O'Bannon is not God's work, Father," Kevin McCarty answered.

For the next two days, Kevin McCarty did little but tend the counter of the store and eat food when he was hungry and sit by the window in his room and compose a letter in his head. When the letter was finally composed to his satisfaction, he put the words upon a piece of paper.

Dear Rory:

You may remember me from our youth or because of my late sister, Rose Kathleen, God rest her soul. I am writing you because Rose Kathleen kept a diary which is now in my possession. I enclose photostats of certain pages from the little book. You will note that your name and the name of Mr. Martello and others are mentioned frequently.

I have not decided just what should be done with this little book. I suppose it is my duty to give it to the authorities. But before I do so I would like to talk to you. If you wish to discuss this matter before I go to the police you must follow my instructions to the letter.

You will come to the room on the second floor front of the house at the address I write below at exactly 3:15 o'clock next Sunday afternoon. You will come alone. I can watch the street from my window and if there are others with you, they will not be admitted to the house. Nor will you be admitted at any time except 3:15 exactly on Sunday afternoon.

You may fear a trap, of course. I tell you that you will find me quite alone and you may remember that I am neither large nor strong. I don't believe that I need warn you to come unarmed. If you fear a trap it would be foolish to supply the police with evidence against you, wouldn't it?

If you do not arrive at 3:15 exactly next Sunday afternoon, I will go directly to the police and the diary will be in their hands by 3:30. If this occurs, you and Mr. Martello and the others will doubtless be arrested and I will make a point of seeing that Mr. Martello

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knows you could have prevented his arrest by merely talking to me.

Kevin McCarty

Kevin mailed the letter and the enclosures. He stopped at a small shop on Bleecker Street and had duplicates made of the keys to his front door and his room. Then he walked to Mercer Street and mounted the stairs to the detective squad room.

When he and Danny were closeted in the little office again, Kevin said, "Danny, my boy, I've progressed from the abstract to the concrete. If you do exactly as I say you may be able to arrest Rory O'Bannon, with ample evidence of his guilt, next Sunday afternoon." He handed the duplicate keys to the detective. "At 3:30 next Sunday afternoon come to this address." He wrote the address of his house upon a slip of paper and handed it to Danny Meighan. "Use the thick key to open the front door. Walk up one flight of stairs. Then left to the room at the front. Open that door with the thin key. That's all you have to do. But if you value your badge and maybe a promotion, be there at 3:30 on the dot, not a minute early or a minute late."

Danny Meighan protested loudly. He demanded to know what Kevin McCarty was up to and he warned him that Rory O'Bannon was dangerous as a rattlesnake.

Kevin silenced him. "You play my way," he said, "or I call the whole game off."

The gentle brother's next problem was obtaining a gun. He had little knowledge of such matters, but he thought you had to have some kind of permit to purchase firearms. He could think of no good reason he might give the authorities for wanting a license for a gun. The simplest thing was to use one of the hunting rifles the Gilbertos kept racked in a storage closet in the back room of the delicatessen. Acquiring the rifle posed a moral problem. Kevin McCarty had no difficulty at all, in his simple way, in determining right from wrong. But determining between two sins was a different matter. In the end, he decided that lying might be less grievous than stealing. One morning, before the other Gilbertos arrived at the store, Kevin approached Jacomo, the eldest of the brothers. He believed Jacomo would prove the most credulous of the three.

"Mr. Jacomo," he said, and he realized how false his voice must sound, "a friend has asked me to go hunting in the woods next Sunday. I wonder if you would lend me one of your fine guns."

Jacomo was not so credulous. He glared at Kevin and twirled his fierce mustachios. "You! Go hunting! Why, I remember when your father wanted to teach you to shoot when you were a boy. You'd not do so much as wing a rabbit with a BB shot. I think it's bigger game than squirrels and rabbits you want my rifle for, and I refuse." The old man twirled his mustache indignantly. "Besides," he added, "you have no hunting license."

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Later in the day Jacomo took his clerk aside. "I did not mean to be so rude," he said. "Take my advice, for I am old and I knew your father, rest his soul. You are not a man who's made for violence. Leave punishment to God and the police."

So the Gilbertos had known about his sister and Rory O'Bannon, too. Everyone had known, it seemed — everyone but Kevin McCarty. He had been too busy with the flowers at the seminary.

In the end he was forced to commit two sins. He had already lied. Now he must steal.

On Friday of that week, two days after he had mailed the letter, Kevin glanced out the window of the store and saw two men eyeing the house where he lived. The shoulders of the men's suits were padded ridiculously and their hats were a size too large. The limousine that was as big and black as a hearse was not in sight, nor was Rory O'Bannon. The two blank-faced men walked down the street to a corner tavern. Presently they returned and entered Gilberto's delicatessen. They must have talked to the bartender who had grown up with Kevin. They walked straight up to him. Kevin was making a "hero" sandwich — a whole small loaf of Italian bread sliced down the middle and stuffed with spiced meat and cheese — for a neighborhood workman. When the two men saw how small and meek Kevin was, they exchanged glances and almost broke out laughing. Kevin finished the sandwich and looked inquiringly at the two blank-faced men as if he had never seen them before.

"Gimme one of them," the first man said, pointing to the bulky sandwich.

"Make it two," said the second man.

Kevin made the sandwiches, then said, "Mustard?"

"Yeah, mustard," said one blank-faced man.

"That's right," said the other.

"Bottla pop," said one.

"Make it two," said the other.

None of the Gilbertos was near. Kevin opened pop bottles on the counter. One blank-faced man pulled out a clasp knife, snapped it open, held Kevin with his eyes. He halved the sandwich with his knife, saying, "Your name McCarty?"

"It is that," Kevin answered.

The blank-faced man said, "You're gonna have a visitor Sunday. At 3:15. Be nice to him. Give him what he wants. We'll be right outside."

The blank-faced man laid the knife on the counter with the blade unsheathed. The two men with padded shoulders ate their sandwiches and drank their pop. They stared at Kevin as they ate and drank. They finished and put a bill upon the counter. One man clasped and pocketed the knife. He pushed a half-dollar tip toward Kevin.

"Be nice," he said again.

The two men with the padded shoulders and the hats a size too large left without looking back.

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Kevin McCarty did not see Rory's bodyguards again that day or on Saturday.

The day that Kevin had dedicated to what he called the devil's work was a Sabbath shining with God's bright sun. Bleecker Street was festive with small Italian girls in starched and frilly dresses who clutched bouquets of white and pink rosebuds. They were starry-eyed after their first communion.

At noon Kevin crossed the street to the delicatessen store and opened the big door with his key. He nodded to several loungers in the street. The loungers knew he worked at the store — they would think nothing of his entering at a time the delicatessen was supposed to be closed. Kevin went at once to the back room and turned on a dim bulb. He secured a screwdriver from the Gilbertos' tool chest. The door to the closet where the guns were kept was fastened by a padlock that fitted two rings screwed into the wall and door. In five minutes Kevin had removed one of the rings and the door creaked open. Kevin McCarty had never pulled a trigger but he knew something about firearms. His father, hoping to interest his son in the sport of hunting, had made Kevin clean his rifles. Kevin liked the weight and balance of a Marlin rifle. He removed it from the rack and loaded it with the proper ammunition. He did not feel too guilty about taking the rifle. It would be returned when the thing was done. He could not return the ammunition, of course. Once a bullet is fired it is of no further use. He had taken only one bullet, because that was all he would need.

Kevin took his sister's diary from his pocket and placed it in the space the Marlin had occupied. It was a safe enough hiding place.

He tore a long piece of wide, brown butcher's paper from a roll in the store. He wrapped the rifle into a shapeless package and wound heavy string around it. He screwed back the ring, to which the padlock was still attached, into the wall and returned to his room with the shapeless package tucked under his arm.

Kevin unwrapped the rifle, then stuffed the paper and string into a tin wastebasket that had Easter lilies painted on it. He leaned the loaded rifle against the window, behind the drapes. He took a Bible from the table and sat down in the chair by the window. It was just 12:30.

At ten minutes after 3, Kevin glanced at the loud-ticking alarm clock on the table. He placed the Bible in his lap, shifted slightly in his chair, and gazed out the window. He saw a limousine as big and black as a hearse approaching. The car passed under Kevin's window very slowly. He could see a blurred face pressed against the window of the car.

The car moved on to the corner and was steered into a parking space. Three men got out. One was Rory O'Bannon. The other two wore suits with padded shoulders and hats a size too large. Kevin smiled. Rory was afraid to come alone. "We'll be

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right outside," one of the men had said. Now the two men seemed to be arguing with Rory. At length one returned to the car. The other walked briskly down the street and took up a post outside Gilberto's Delicatessen. Rory O'Bannon crossed to Kevin's side of the street. When he reached the house, he examined the number on the door. The bell buzzed in Kevin's room. It was exactly 3:15. Kevin placed the Bible on the table, then pressed the plunger that released the front door latch. He glanced out the window to make sure that only Rory entered. He opened the door of his room slightly and left it ajar. He returned to the chair by the window. He could feel the rifle through the drapes. The stairs groaned under Rory's weight.

Then there was a soft tapping on the door.

"Come in, Rory. I'm quite alone."

Rory O'Bannon's big frame filled the doorway. The wild eyes darted suspiciously about the little room. The big man crossed to Kevin's chair in three strides. He grabbed Kevin under the arms and pulled him up roughly. Without saying a word, he tapped Kevin's pockets and armpits. He shoved Kevin back into the chair, jerked open the door of the closet, and peered inside. He even looked under the bed. At last he was satisfied. He looked speculatively at Kevin McCarty, gave a short, unpleasant laugh, seated himself on the edge of a chair, and said, "You got the diary? What's the deal?"

"I don't have the diary here," Kevin answered. "It's hidden in a place known only to myself. There's a way you can prevent me taking it to the police. Let's understand each other, Rory. You once tried beating me to make me say a thing I didn't want to say. That didn't work. I know your men are downstairs. You can't kidnap me, though — Bleecker is a crowded street. You could never get away with dragging me to that big car of yours."

"How much you want?" asked Rory. "Wait. I got something to tell you first. It ain't worth much. It ain't worth much because your little sister was a hophead and a tramp. A judge or jury won't believe much of what a hophead and a tramp writes down. But it might cause a little trouble. Martello don't like trouble. He'll pay a little just to save him trouble."

Kevin McCarty stole a glance at the clock. 3:23. Seven minutes more. Maybe he had timed it wrong. Maybe he should have allowed only ten minutes instead of fifteen. He pretended to think over the sum he should ask. The clock ticked loudly but all too slowly.

Finally, he said, "I don't want money, Rory. I took the Jesuit vow of poverty once. I only want to prove a theory. The Jesuits are great ones for proving theories, Rory."

The clock ticked. 3:25. Five minutes more.

"Quit the double-talk," said Rory angrily. "Whatcha trying to prove?"

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"I've always had a theory you were yellow, Rory. I want to prove it."

Rory O'Bannon's face went crimson. He rose from his chair, advanced a step toward the frail, calm man. Kevin McCarty hadn't risen from the chair. But a rifle had suddenly appeared in his hands. The rifle was pointed directly at Rory O'Bannon.

3:26.

"Don't come any closer, Rory," Kevin McCarty warned. "The rifle's loaded. Sit down in the chair."

Rory sat. "You doublecrossing rat," he said.

Kevin McCarty said, "No, Rory. You'll get your chance, just as I promised. I think you're yellow. I don't think you have the guts to kill a man. I want to prove you haven't."

3:27.

Kevin McCarty glanced out the window. The big, black car was still parked down the street. The blank-faced man was standing intent, motionless, across the street. Then Kevin saw Danny Meighan approaching. He was walking at a pace that was maddeningly slow.

"In just a minute I'm going to walk out that door, Rory," Kevin McCarty said. "I'm going to get the diary and go straight to the police. There's only one way you can stop me. You can kill me."

"You've flipped your lid," said Rory. "Listen, I'll pay, see? I'll pay plenty. You can give it to the church."

Danny Meighan was in front of the house now. He was consulting a slip of paper to confirm the address. He was mounting the stoop. Kevin McCarty rose. He crossed the room. He stood by the door. Below, he heard steps mounting the stairs. He tossed the rifle into Rory O'Bannon's lap. He said, "It's on safety. Snap back that little knob on the right to take it off. I'm leaving, Rory. This is your last chance." He touched the doorknob. "Shoot me now, Rory, or I go to the cops. Be sure you kill me — or I'll talk and tell them where to find the diary."

Rory raised the rifle, complete amazement on his face.

A man, walking cautiously, was coming down the hall.

"Goodbye, Rory O'Bannon," said Kevin McCarty, turning the knob.

The small room was filled with sudden sound.

Kevin McCarty crumpled to the floor.

The gentlest of the brothers lived for just 60 tickings of the clock. But he lived long enough.

He lived long enough to hear the door fly open and to see Danny Meighan standing there with a revolver in his hand. He lived long enough to hear the futile trigger-click of the now empty rifle, to hear the rifle drop to the floor, and to hear Rory's squeal, "Don't shoot! Don't shoot me, copper!"

He lived just long enough to know that Rory O'Bannon would surely die in the electric chair for the murder of Kevin McCarty.

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DOCTOR GESELL WOULD APPROVE

Ever since EQMM started fifteen years ago, we have maintained one steadfast policy: to offer you the widest possible diversity of crime, detective, and mystery short stories — every type of whodunit, howdunit, and whydunit — including the orthodox and unorthodox; the psychological and psychiatric; the simple, the complex, and the tour de force; the photographically realistic and the whimsically fantastic — everything from a classic locked-room baffler to a straight cop story and suspense thriller.

Recently we gave you examples of two rarities in the field: the "little magazine" crime story with emphasis on literary artistry and modern technique, and the "experimental magazine" crime story with emphasis on literary impressionism and modernistic technique. Now it occurs to us that we have overlooked one contemporary 'tec type. What are we feeding our children in the way of literary detection? Or, if they are too young to read for themselves, what are we parents reading to them?

So we scouted around and found "Humpty Dumpty's Magazine for Little Children" (published by the publishers of "Parents' Magazine"). "Humpty Dumpty's" has a circulation of more than a million copies each month, and a monthly readership of probably four or five millions. And in the February 1955 issue we came upon a short tale by Martin Gardner who is a contributor to "Esquire" and "Fantasy and Science Fiction," and the author of articles on the philosophy of science which have appeared in such journals as "Yale Review," "Scripta Mathematica," "Antioch Review," and other research periodicals. Mr. Gardner is at present working on a book dealing with recreational logic, and his IN THE NAME OF SCIENCE *(Putnam, 1952) received splendid reviews as a semi-serious study of pseudo-scientists and the strange cults that have developed around their off-beat theories.*

So you think you know what to expect?

Would Charles Lutwidge Dodgson's students have known what to expect from an author calling himself Lewis Carroll?

Well, read the adventure of "The Missing Walnuts" and see . . . For Mr. Gardner — sophisticated short-story writer, authority on the philosophy of science and recreational logic — goes back to fundamentals in his approach to the criminological care and feeding of our children. The detective in his story is a wise old owl who plays the violin, wears a deer-

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stalker cap, uses a magnifying glass to examine the scene of the crime, and finally says, looking very pleased with himself, "It was elementary, my dear Chester."

Need we say more? Need we have any deep-seated fears about the 'tec training of our youngsters?

9. THE MISSING WALNUTS

by MARTIN GARDNER

IN THE SPRING AND SUMMER, MOTHER-goose Park is filled with noisy, shouting animal children. But now it was the middle of winter and as Junior, the egg, walked through the park it was deserted. All he could hear was the sound of his own footsteps crunching in the snow, and the wind whistling through the bare branches of the trees.

On one side of the park there is a swing that hangs from a branch of a large walnut tree. When Junior came to the tree he was surprised to see his friend Chester Squirrel digging a hole in the ground near the swing. Chester looked very angry.

"Hello, Chester," said Junior. "What's the matter?"

The little squirrel stopped digging. "I can't find my walnuts!" he cried. "Last October I buried sixteen of them right in this spot, but now they're gone. If I don't find them I won't have enough food left to last the winter!"

"Do you think somebody stole them?" Junior asked in sympathy.

"I don't think — I know somebody did," said Chester. "And I'm going right over to the police station and tell them about it."

"I don't think anyone in Mother-Gooseland would steal food from anybody," Junior said. "Why don't we go and see Albert, the wise old owl? Then if he can't help you find the walnuts we can tell the police."

"That's a good idea," said Chester with a flick of his bushy tail. "Albert is clever at solving mysteries like this."

Junior and Chester hurried through the snow to the big elm tree where Albert lived. They could hear violin music coming from inside the tree.

"Albert!" they both shouted.

The music stopped and Albert stepped out of a hole near the bottom of the tree. His violin was tucked under one wing and he looked very bored and sleepy. "Good morning!" he said with a yawn. "What can I do for you, my friends? Things have been mighty dull lately in Mother-Gooseland. I trust you have some simple problem for me to solve."

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"It may not be so simple," said Chester. "In fact, I think a crime has been committed."

"A crime!" exclaimed Albert, opening his large eyes. "Did you say a crime?"

"Yes," said Chester. "Somebody stole the walnuts I buried last year by the swing in the park."

Albert's eyes sparkled with excitement. He rushed into the tree to leave his violin, then he came out wearing a deerstalker cap and smoking a large curved pipe. "No time to waste," he said. "Let us proceed at once to the scene of the crime."

When the three of them arrived at the swing, Chester showed Albert the spot where he had been digging. The owl pulled a large magnifying glass from his pocket and examined the hole carefully. "It's empty, all right," he said.

Junior and Chester watched with interest while the owl scurried about over the snow, examining the footprints with his magnifying glass. "Hmm," he said between puffs on his pipe, "I can tell from these tracks in the snow that a squirrel and a little egg walked by here recently."

"That's us," Junior said.

"Quite so," said Albert.

The owl flew up to the branch of the walnut tree where the two ropes of the swing were tied. He studied the branch carefully through his magnifying glass. Then he flew over to the opposite side of the tree and inspected a large branch on the other side.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "An important clue! The bark on this branch is rubbed smooth in two places."

Albert closed his eyes and puffed for a while on his pipe. Then he opened his eyes suddenly, cleared his throat, and said, "Now listen carefully and I'll tell you exactly what happened. Last October, Chester buried his walnuts near the swing. But this winter the swing was moved from one side of the tree to the other. Now if Chester will try digging a hole *here* — on the side of the tree where the swing used to be — I think he'll find his walnuts."

Chester scampered over to the spot where Albert was pointing with his pipe. He started digging as fast as he could. Sure enough, there were his walnuts — all sixteen of them!

Junior clapped his hands and Chester ran over to shake the tip of the owl's wing. "Thank you, Albert," he said. "You certainly solved that mystery fast! Now I'll have plenty of food for the rest of the winter."

"It was elementary, my dear Chester," said the owl, looking very pleased with himself. "Whenever any little problem comes your way, I shall be happy, if I can, to give you a hint or two as to its solution."

Albert yawned; then he put his magnifying glass back in his pocket and off he flew home.

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10. EVERY MONDAY, A NEW LETTER

by MICHAEL GILBERT

CURIOUSLY ENOUGH, CONSIDERING the tortuous ramifications of his own mind, Bohun had never been attracted to mathematics. The routine of his schooldays had carried him to the fringe of statistics but a merciful twist of fate had then diverted him into the byways of history and literature.

A knowledge of quite elementary mathematics had, however, once enabled him to solve an unpleasant problem without moving from his desk in his Lincolns Inn office.

Mr. Taylor was a new client, introduced by the country firm for whom they did agency work. He was a pleasant-looking, rather pale-faced man of about 30, with indeterminate-colored hair, a modest smile, and a tie which proclaimed that he had been to the same Public School as Bohun himself.

"It's the terrible regularity of it," he said. "Wasn't there a Chinese torture — drops of water — well, that's the effect it has had on me. Every Monday morning, a new letter. It's been going on for nearly three months now."

Bohun examined the letters spread out on the top of his desk. There were eleven of them, all put together in the same way, with words and letters cut from newspapers and pasted onto paper.

None of the letters was pleasant, but it was difficult to put a finger on their exact unpleasantness. They jeered. They probed. They twisted. They did not threaten — at least, not directly.

You always were a coward, said one, *who would rather cry than sing for his supper.*

Afraid of the dark? said another; *have you ever thought that, for the blind, darkness goes on forever?*

Bohun turned the pieces of paper over thoughtfully. He could sympathize with Mr. Taylor. One of them might be laughed off. A weekly dose for nearly three months was a good deal less than funny.

"Have you told the police about them?" he said.

"They hardly seemed to be a police matter," said Mr. Taylor. "They're sort of intimate, family things. Not really criminal."

"Crime often flourishes inside the family circle," said Bohun. Nevertheless, he was inclined to agree — it was not a police matter. *The dogs of war*, said a third message; *by the way, you never liked dogs did you? War was more fun. Are you still wearing your wound stripe for that mess party at Catterick?*

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There were others in the same strain.

"What's all this about dogs?" said Bohun.

Mr. Taylor turned a little pink. "I was bitten in the ankle by a dog when I was four years old," he said. "I've always had a — a thing about them. I can usually control it now — but if it happens unexpectedly — if a dog comes running out of a garden and starts yapping at me — I'm quite likely to take to my heels."

"Elephants react in exactly the same way," said Bohun. "Are the other things founded on truth as well?"

"Yes," said Mr. Taylor, uncomfortably but defiantly. "I suppose it is true that the only actual wound I did get was when I fell off the billiard table after a Mess night at Catterick and broke my ankle — I was in Signals."

"Lots of people didn't hurt themselves even that much," said Bohun. "And the fear of darkness — I suppose that's a childish inhibition, too."

"That was a long time ago," said Mr. Taylor. "I got over that before I went to school."

"You were at Slaughterhouse, I see."

"That's right — were you?"

"Before your time, I imagine. I happened to notice, in the first note I read, the reference to 'singing for your supper.' An old Slaughterhouse custom. Most unnerving."

"It unnerved me," said Mr. Taylor. He seemed to be easier now that he had actually started on the confessional. "I think I was the only one of the new boys who was actually reduced to tears."

"It's curious," said Bohun. "Very curious. Not your being reduced to tears — I remember feeling that way myself. But the selection of these particular events. In some ways they seem to hang together. In other ways, they're curiously unrelated. Perhaps you'd better tell me. We shall have to come to it sooner or later. *Is* there anyone you actually suspect? It must be someone who knows you pretty well."

"That's what makes it so disturbing," said Mr. Taylor. "And I most particularly don't want to be disturbed just now. I'm holding down a new job — which is ticklish enough — and — well, I'm getting married."

"Congratulations," said Bohun. He was a bachelor and had every intention of remaining so. "Do you live at home at the moment, then?"

"I share a flat with my elder sister, Constance. My mother and father are dead."

"Ah," said Bohun. He wrote down *Constance* on the blank piece of paper in front of him. "By the way, you didn't tell me your fiancée's name."

"Miss Holman — Valerie Holman."

Bohun wrote down *Valerie*.

"And you haven't told me yet whom you suspect," he said.

"It's all so indefinite," said Mr. Taylor. "However — yes — there is someone. It's Bill Bayes. I've known

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him — oh — a long time. He was at Slaughterhouse with me. And after that in the Army. Not the same crowd, but I keep running across him."

"Sounds promising," said Bohun. "Very promising, indeed. But is there any particular reason why Bill should feel that way about you?"

"There could be," said Mr. Taylor. "You see, this job I got — if I hadn't got it, he would have had it. I think he felt it."

Bohun added *Bill* to *Constance* and *Valerie* and stared thoughtfully at his little list.

"Is there anyone at all, outside these three, who would know enough about your affairs —"

"But look here," said Mr. Taylor, angrily, "I never said I suspected Connie. And as for Val — the idea's absurd."

Nevertheless, though he spoke explosively, there was something in his voice that gave Bohun the courage to persevere.

"I can't pretend," he said, "to understand people who are in love. They hurt themselves. They hurt each other. And as for your sister, has it ever occurred to you that she might be jealous? I don't mean of your fiancée, but of the idea of your getting married."

"It's a possibility," said Mr. Taylor.

"Then let's get back to my question. *Could* there be anyone else?"

Mr. Taylor considered the matter. "I don't really see that there could," he said at last.

"Well, then, we've got somewhere," said Bohun. "Now. Take these four incidents. I take it that your sister would certainly know about your fear of the dark and your fear of dogs. You might have told her, in the holidays, about your experiences at school. That makes three. But the fourth — I take it you never told her about Mess nights at Catterick."

"I don't think I ever told her about school either."

"All right," said Bohun. "That's clear enough." As he spoke he was making a series of marks after each of the names on the paper.

"Bill Bayes would know about your schooldays. And even if he wasn't in the same unit, he would almost certainly know about the Catterick episode. He might also have found out about the dogs. But you mentioned that you'd got over your fear of darkness *before* you went to School. He couldn't have known about that."

"No, I suppose not," said Mr. Taylor, unwillingly. He seemed to find Bohun's analytical method somewhat disconcerting.

"Finally," said Bohun, "there is your fiancée. Here there are no rules. I should imagine that a man might tell his fiancée almost anything. There's a certain sporting flavor about getting drunk and falling off a billiard table. And the fear of darkness, especially if conquered a long time ago. The matter of dogs — well, possibly it would be better to explain it than to have her find out for herself. I should have thought, however, that a school-

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boy episode, which reflected no credit — however, I'm theorizing unnecessarily. You can tell me yourself. Which of them *did* she know about?"

"Look here," said Mr. Taylor, uncomfortably. "I don't like this. I'm not at all sure I want to go on with it."

"Come along," said Bohun. "We're nearly finished. What was it? The first three and not the last?"

"I suppose so. I certainly never talked about school to her."

"In that case," said Bohun, cheerfully, "we have a most interesting equation." He drew a line under his calculations. "Of the three people who might have written the notes, no one of them has all the necessary knowledge. All three persons probably knew two facts out of four. Two of them might have known three. But none of them can have known all. And I think we can dismiss any idea that two of them collaborated. Unthinkable? I agree."

Mr. Taylor nodded miserably.

"It's just like a problem in H.C.F. You remember H.C.F.? The Highest Common Factor. You take three numbers — say 48, 24, and 18. Problem, to find the highest common factor of all of them. In that case 6. You see? In other cases it wasn't a matter of the Highest Common Factor but of finding any common factor at all. That's the situation here in a nutshell, isn't it? Four totals. Three possible factors. Only no one of the factors will go into all the totals."

Mr. Taylor seemed to be beyond speech.

"However," said Bohun, "don't despair. Mathematics is a marvelous science. There *is* a number that will go into any other number."

He finished his calculations with a flourish, and passed it across the table. Mr. Taylor stared at the paper blindly, grasped his hat, and stumbled out of the room.

"I'm afraid I've lost us a client," said Bohun to his partner, Mr. Coates. He had been recounting the events of the morning.

"I don't see it yet," said Coates. "What number will go into any other number?"

"One, of course," said Bohun. "It's the universal common factor."

"You mean —?"

"He'd written all the notes to himself. Must have. Don't ask me why. Might have planned to get Bayes into trouble. Might have been an expression of hostility to his sister. . . . Remember that lady client of yours who used to write herself love letters? Unaccountable thing, human nature. Give me mathematics every time."

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Do you recall the brilliant interchange between Sherlock Holmes and Inspector Gregory in "Silver Blaze," perhaps the best of the MEMOIRS — *indeed, one of the finest of all the Sherlock Holmes short stories? Inspector Gregory had asked Holmes:*

"Is there any point to which you would wish to draw my attention?"

And Holmes replied: "To the curious incident of the dog in the night-time."

At which Inspector Gregory said: "The dog did nothing in the night-time."

"That was the curious incident," remarked Sherlock Holmes.

All of which leads us to Rex Stout's "A Dog in the Daytime." Now, you will not find a similar conversation in Mr. Stout's story, but we can imagine hearing something like this:

Inspector Cramer: "Anything you'd care to tip me off to?"

Nero Wolfe: "There's the curious incident of the dog in the daytime."

Inspector Cramer: "The dog did something in the daytime?"

Nero Wolfe: "Exactly. That was the curious incident."

II. A DOG IN THE DAYTIME

by REX STOUT

I DO SOMETIMES TREAT MYSELF TO A walk in the rain, though I prefer sunshine as a general rule. That rainy Wednesday, however, there was a special inducement: I wanted his raincoat to be good and wet when I delivered it. So, with it on my back and my old brown felt on my head, I left Nero Wolfe's brownstone house on West 35th Street, Borough of Manhattan, and set out for Arbor Street, which is down in Greenwich Village.

Halfway there the rain stopped and my blood had pumped me warm, so I took the coat off, folded it wet side in, hung it on my arm, and proceeded. Arbor Street, narrow and only three blocks long, had on either side an assortment of old brick houses, mostly of four stories, which were neither spick nor span. Number 29 would be about the middle of the first block.

I reached it, but I didn't enter it. There was a party going on in the middle of the block. A police car was double-parked in front of one of the houses, and a uniformed cop was on the sidewalk in an attitude of authority toward a small gathering

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of citizens confronting him. As I approached I heard him demanding, "Whose dog is this?"

He was referring, evidently, to an animal with a wet black coat standing behind him. I heard no one claim the dog, but I wouldn't have, anyway, because my attention was diverted. Another police car rolled up and stopped behind the first one, and a man got out, nodded to the cop without halting, and went in the entrance of Number 29.

The trouble was, I knew the man, which is an understatement. I do not begin to tremble at the sight of Sergeant Purley Stebbins of Manhattan Homicide West, but his presence and manner made it a cinch that there was a corpse in that house, and if I demanded entry on the ground that I wanted to swap raincoats with a guy who had walked off with mine, there was no question what would happen. My prompt appearance at the scene of a homicide would arouse all Purley's worst instincts, and I might not get home in time for dinner, which was going to be featured by grilled squab with a brown sauce which Fritz calls *Venitienne* and is one of his best.

Purley had disappeared inside without spotting me. The cop was a complete stranger. As I slowed down to detour past him on the narrow sidewalk, he gave me an eye and demanded, "That your dog?"

The dog was nuzzling my knee, and I stooped to give him a pat on his wet black head. Then, telling the cop he wasn't mine, I went on by. At the next corner I turned right, heading back uptown. A wind had started in from the west, but everything was still damp from the rain.

I was well on my way before I saw the dog. Stopping for a light on Ninth Avenue in the Twenties, I felt something at my knee, and there he was. My hand started for his head in reflex, but I pulled it back. I was in a fix. Apparently he had picked me for a pal, and if I just went on he would follow, and you can't chase a dog on Ninth Avenue by throwing rocks. I could have ditched him by taking a taxi the rest of the way, but that would have been pretty rude after the appreciation he had shown of my charm. He had a collar on with a tag and could be identified, and the station house was only a few blocks away, so the simplest way was to convoy him there. I moved to the curb to reconnoiter, and as I did so a cyclone sailed around the corner and took my hat with it into the middle of the avenue.

I didn't dash out into the traffic, but you should have seen that dog. He sprang across the bow of a big truck, wiping its left front fender with his tail, braked landing to let a car by, sprang again and was under another car — or I thought he was — and then I saw him on the opposite sidewalk. He snatched the hat from under the feet of a pedestrian, turned on a dime, and started back. This time his crossing wasn't so spectacular, but he didn't dally. He came to me

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and stood, lifting his head and wagging his tail. I took the hat. It had skimmed a puddle of water on its trip, but I thought he would be disappointed if I didn't put it on, so I did. Naturally, that settled it. I flagged a cab, took the dog in with me, and gave the driver the address of Wolfe's house.

My idea was to take my hat hound upstairs to my room, give him some refreshment, and phone the ASPCA to send for him. But there was no sense in passing up such an opportunity for a little buzz at Wolfe, so, after leaving my hat and the raincoat on the rack in the hall, I proceeded to the office and entered.

"Where the deuce have you been?" Wolfe asked grumpily. "We were going over some lists at 6 o'clock, and it's a quarter to 7." He was in his oversized chair behind his desk with a book, and his eyes hadn't left the page to spare me a glance.

I answered him. "Returning that fool raincoat. Only, I didn't deliver it, because —"

"What's that?" he snapped. He was glaring at my companion.

"A dog."

"I see it is. I'm in no temper for buffoonery. Get it out of here."

"Yes, sir, right away. I can keep him in my room most of the time, but of course he'll have to come downstairs and through the hall when I take him out. He's a hat hound. There is a sort of problem. His name is Nero, which as you know means 'black,' and of course I'll have to change it. Ebony would do, or Jet, or Inky, or —"

"Bah. Flummery!"

"No, sir. I get pretty darned lonesome around here, especially during the four hours a day you're up in the plant rooms. You have your orchids, and Fritz has his turtle, and Theodore has his parakeets up in the potting room, so why shouldn't I have a dog? I admit I'll have to change his name, though he is registered as Champion Nero Charcoal of Bantyscoot."

It was a fizzle. I had expected to induce a major outburst, even possibly something as frantic as Wolfe leaving his chair to evict the beast himself, and there he was gazing at Nero with an expression I had never seen him aim at any human, including me.

"It's not a hound," he said. "It's a Labrador retriever."

That didn't faze me, from a bird who reads as many books as Wolfe does. "Yes, sir," I agreed. "I only said hound because it would be natural for a private detective to have a hound."

"Labradors," he said, "have a wider skull than any other dog, for brain room. A dog I had when I was a boy, in Montenegro, a small brown mongrel, had a rather narrow skull, but I did not regard it as a defect. I do not remember that I considered that dog to have a defect. Today I suppose I would be more critical. . . . When you smuggled that creature in here did you take into account the disruption it would cause in this household?"

It had backfired on me. I had

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learned something new about the big, fat genius: he would enjoy having a dog around, provided he could blame it on me and so be free to beef when he felt like it. As for me, when I retire to the country I'll have a dog, and maybe two, but not in town.

I snapped into reverse. "I guess I didn't," I confessed. "Okay, I'll get rid of him. After all, it's your house."

"I do not want to feel responsible," he said stiffly, "for your privation. I would almost rather put up with the dog than with your reproaches."

"Forget it." I waved a hand. "I'll try to — myself."

"Another thing," he persisted. "I refuse to interfere with any commitment you have made."

"I have made no commitment."

"Then where did you get it?"

"Well, I'll tell you."

I went and sat at my desk and did so. Nero — the four-legged one — came and lay at my feet with his nose just not touching the toe of my shoe. I reported the whole event, with as much detail as if I had been reporting a major case, and when I had finished Wolfe was, of course, quite aware that my presentation of Nero had been a gag. Ordinarily, he would have made his opinion of my performance clear, but this time he skipped it, and it was easy to see why. The idea of having a dog that he could blame on me had got in and stuck. When I came to the end there was a moment's silence; then he said:

"Jet would be an acceptable name for that dog."

"Yeah." I swiveled and reached for the phone. "I'll call the ASPCA to come for him."

"No." He was emphatic.

"Why not?"

"Because there is a better alternative. Call someone you know in the Police Department, anyone, give him the number on the dog's tag, and ask him to find out who the owner is. Then you can inform the owner directly."

He was playing for time. It could happen that the owner was dead or in jail or didn't want the dog back, and, if so, Wolfe could take the position that I had committed myself by bringing the dog home in a taxi and that it would be dishonorable to renege. However, I didn't want to argue, so I phoned a precinct sergeant I knew. He took Nero's number and said he would call me back. Then Fritz entered to announce dinner.

The squabs with that sauce were absolutely edible, as they always are, but other phenomena in the next couple of hours were not so pleasing. The table talk in the dining room was mostly one-sided and mostly about dogs. Wolfe kept it on a high level, no maudlin sentiment. He maintained that the Basenji was the oldest breed on earth, having originated in Central Africa around 5,000 B. C., whereas there was no trace of the Afghan hound earlier than around 4,000 B. C. To me, all it proved was that he had read a book.

Nero ate in the kitchen with Fritz and made a hit. Wolfe had told Fritz

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to call him Jet. When Fritz brought in the salad he announced that Jet had wonderful manners and was very smart.

"Nevertheless," Wolfe asked, "wouldn't you think him an insufferable nuisance as a member of the household?"

On the contrary, Fritz declared, Jet would be most welcome.

After dinner, feeling that the newly formed Canine Canonizing League needed slowing down, I first took Nero out for a brief tour and then escorted him up the two flights to my room and left him there. I had to admit he was well-behaved. If I had wanted to take on a dog in town it could have been this one. In my room I told him to lie down, and he did, and when I went to the door to leave, his eyes, which were the color of caramel, made it plain that he would love to come along, but he didn't get up.

Down in the office Wolfe and I got at the lists. They were special offerings from orchid growers and collectors from all over the world, and it was quite a job to check the thousands of items and pick the few that Wolfe might want to give a try. I sat at his desk, across from him, with trays of cards from our files, and we were in the middle of it, around ten thirty, when the doorbell rang. I went to the hall and flipped a light switch and saw out on the stoop, through the one-way glass panel in the door, a familiar figure — Inspector Cramer of Homicide.

I went to the door, opened it six inches, and asked politely, "Now what?"

"I want to see Wolfe."

"It's pretty late. What about?"

"About a dog."

It is understood that no visitor, and especially no officer of the law, is to be conducted to the office until Wolfe has been consulted, but this seemed to rate an exception. I considered the matter for about two seconds, and then swung the door open and invited cordially:

"Step right in."

"Properly speaking," Cramer declared, as one who wanted above all to be perfectly fair and square, "it's Goodwin I want information from."

He was in the red-leather chair at the end of Wolfe's desk, just about filling it. His big, round face was no redder than usual, his gray eyes no colder, his voice no gruffer. Merely normal.

Wolfe came at me: "Then why did you bring him in here without even asking?"

Cramer interfered for me: "I asked for you. Of course, you're in it. I want to know where the dog fits in. Where is it, Goodwin?"

I inquired innocently, "Dog?"

His lips tightened. "All right; I'll spell it. You phoned the precinct and gave them a tag number and wanted to know who owns the dog. When the sergeant learned that the owner was a man named Philip Kampf, who was murdered this afternoon in a house at Twenty-nine Arbor Street, he noti-

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fied Homicide. The officer who had been on post in front of that house had told us that the dog went off with a man who had said it wasn't his dog. After we learned of your inquiry about the owner, the officer was shown a picture of you, and said it was you who enticed the dog. He's outside in my car. Do you want to bring him in?"

"No, thanks. I didn't entice."

"The dog followed you."

I gestured modestly. "Girls follow me, dogs follow me, sometimes even your own dicks follow me. I can't help —"

"Skip the comedy. The dog belonged to a murder victim, and you removed it from the scene of the murder. Where is the dog?"

Wolfe butted in. "You persist," he objected, "in imputing an action to Mr. Goodwin without warrant. He did not 'remove' the dog. I advise you to shift your ground if you expect us to listen."

His tone was firm but not hostile. I cocked an eye at him. He was probably being indulgent because he had learned that Jet's owner was dead.

"I've got another ground," Cramer asserted. "A man who lives in that house, named Richard Meegan, and who was in it at the time Kampf was murdered, has stated that he came here to see you this morning and asked you to do a job for him. He says you refused the job. That's what he says."

Cramer jutted his chin. "Now. A man at the scene of a murder admits he consulted you this morning. Goodwin shows up at the scene half an hour after the murder was committed, and he entices — okay, the dog goes away with him. The dog that belonged to the victim and had gone to that house with him. How does that look?" He pulled his chin in. "You know the last thing I want in a homicide is to find you or Goodwin anywhere within ten miles of it, because I know from experience what to expect. But when you're there, there you are, and I want to know how and why, and what, and I intend to. Where's the dog?"

Wolfe sighed and shook his head. "In this instance," he said, almost genially, "you're wasting your time. As for Mr. Meegan, he phoned this morning to make an appointment and came at eleven. Our conversation was brief. He wanted a man shadowed, but divulged no name or any other specific detail, because in his first breath he mentioned his wife — he was overwrought — and I gathered that his difficulty was marital. As you know, I don't touch that kind of work, and I stopped him. My bluntness enraged him and he dashed out. On his way he took his hat from the rack in the hall, and he took Mr. Goodwin's raincoat instead of his own. Now, Archie, proceed."

Cramer's eyes swiveled to me, and I obeyed: "I didn't find out about the switch in coats until the middle of the afternoon. His was the same color as mine, but mine's newer. When he phoned for an appointment this morn-

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ing he gave me his name and address. I wanted to phone him to tell him to bring my coat back, but he wasn't listed, and Information said she didn't have him, so I decided to go get it. I walked, wearing Meegan's coat. There was a cop and a crowd and a PD car in front of Twenty-nine Arbor Street, and as I approached another PD car came, and Purley Stebbins got out and went in, so I decided to skip it, not wanting to go through the torture. There was a dog present, and it nuzzled me, and I patted it. Then I headed for home."

"Did you call the dog or signal it?"

"No. I was at Twenty-eighth Street and Ninth Avenue before I knew it was tailing me. I did not entice or remove. If I did — if there's some kind of a dodge about the dog — please tell me why I phoned the precinct to get the name of his owner."

"I don't know. With Wolfe and you I never know. Where is it?"

I blurted it out before Wolfe could stop me: "Upstairs in my room."

"Bring it down here."

I was up and going, but Wolfe called me sharply: "Archie!"

I turned. "Yes, sir."

"There's no frantic urgency." He said to Cramer, "The animal seems intelligent, but I doubt if it's up to answering questions. I don't want it capering around my office."

"Neither do I."

"Then why bring it down?"

"I'm taking it downtown. We want to try something with it."

Wolfe pursed his lips. "I doubt if that's feasible. Mr. Goodwin has assumed an obligation and will have to honor it. The creature has no master, and so presumably no home. It will have to be tolerated here until Mr. Goodwin gets satisfactory assurance of its future welfare. Archie?"

If we had been alone I would have made my position clear, but with Cramer there I was stuck. "Absolutely," I agreed, sitting down again.

"You see," Wolfe told Cramer. "I'm afraid we can't permit the dog's removal."

"Nuts. I'm taking it."

"Indeed? What writ have you? Replevin? Warrant for arrest as a material witness?"

Cramer opened his mouth, and shut it again. He put his elbows on the chair arms, interlaced his fingers, and leaned forward. "Look. You and Meegan check, either because you're telling it straight, or because you've framed it. But I'm taking the dog. Kampf, the man who was killed, lived on Perry Street, a few blocks away from Arbor Street. He arrived at Twenty-nine Arbor Street, with the dog on a leash, about 5:20 this afternoon.

"The janitor of the house, named Olsen, lives in the basement, and he was sitting at his front window when he saw Kampf arrive with the dog and turn in at the entrance. About ten minutes later he saw the dog come out, with no leash, and right after the dog a man came out. The man was Victor Talento, a lawyer, the tenant of the ground-floor apartment. Ta-

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lento's story is that he left his apartment to go to an appointment, saw the dog in the hall, thought it was a stray, and chased it out. Olsen says Talento walked off and the dog stayed there on the sidewalk."

Cramer unlaced his fingers and sat back. "About twenty minutes later, around ten minutes to 6:00, Olsen heard someone yelling his name, and went to the rear and up one flight to the ground-floor hall. Two men were there — a live one and a dead one. The live one was Ross Chaffee, a painter, the tenant of the top-floor studio — that's the fourth floor. The dead one was the man that had arrived with the dog. He had been strangled with the dog's leash, and the body was at the bottom of the stairs. Chaffee says he found it when he came down to go to an appointment, and that's all he knows. He stayed there while Olsen went downstairs to phone. A squad car arrived at 5:58. Sergeant Stebbins arrived at 6:10. Goodwin arrived at 6:10. Excellent timing."

Wolfe merely grunted.

Cramer continued: "You can have it all. The dog's leash was in the pocket of Kampf's raincoat, which was on him. The laboratory says it was used to strangle him. The routine is still in process. I'll answer questions within reason. The four tenants of the house were all there when Kampf arrived: Victor Talento, the lawyer, on the ground floor; Richard Meegan, whose job you say you wouldn't take, second floor; Jerome Aland, a night-club comedian, third floor; and Ross Chaffee, the painter, with the top-floor studio. Aland says he was sound asleep until we banged on his door just before taking him down to look at the corpse. Meegan says he heard nothing and knows nothing."

Cramer sat forward again. "Okay, what happened? Kampf went there to see one of those four men, and had his dog with him. It's possible he took the leash off in the lower hall and left the dog there, but I doubt it. At least, it's just as possible that he took the dog along to the door of one of the apartments, and the dog was wet and the tenant wouldn't let it enter, so Kampf left it outside. Another possibility is that the dog was actually present when Kampf was killed, but we'll know more about that after we see and handle the dog. What we're going to do is take the dog in that house and see which door it goes to. We're going to do that now. There's a man out in my car who knows dogs." Cramer stood up.

Wolfe shook his head. "You must be hard put. You say Mr. Kampf lived on Perry Street. With a family?"

"No. Bachelor. Some kind of a writer. He didn't have to make a living; he had means."

"Then the beast is orphaned. He's in your room, Archie?"

"Yes, sir." I got up and started for the door.

Wolfe halted me. "One moment. Go in your room, lock the door, and stay there till I notify you. Go!"

I went. It was either that or quit my job on the spot, and I resign only

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when we haven't got company. Also, assuming that there was a valid reason for refusing to surrender the dog to the cops, Wolfe was justified. Cramer, needing no warrant to enter the house because he was already in, wouldn't hesitate to mount to my room to do his own fetching, and stopping him physically would have raised some delicate points. Whereas breaking through a locked door would be another matter.

I didn't lock it, because it hadn't been locked for years and I didn't remember where the key was, so I left it open and stood on the sill to listen. If I heard Cramer coming I would shut the door and brace it with my foot. Nero, or Jet, depending on where you stand, came over to me, but I ordered him back, and he went without a murmur. From below came voices, not cordial, but not raised enough for me to get words. Before long there was the sound of Cramer's heavy steps leaving the office and tramping along the hall, then the slam of the front door.

I called down: "All clear?"

"No!" It was a bellow. "Wait till I bolt it!" And after a moment: "All right!"

I shut my door and descended the stairs. Wolfe was back in his chair behind his desk, sitting straight. As I entered he snapped at me: "A pretty mess! You sneak a dog in here to badger me, and what now?"

I crossed to my desk, sat, and spoke calmly: "We're 'way beyond that. You will never admit you bollixed it up yourself, so forget it. When you ask me what now, that's easy. I could say I'll take the dog down and deliver him at Homicide, but we're beyond that too. Not only have you learned that he is orphaned, as you put it, and therefore adopting him will probable be simple, but also you have taken a stand with Cramer, and of course you won't back up. If we sit tight, with the door bolted, I suppose I can take the dog out back for his outings, but what if the law shows up tomorrow with a writ?"

He leaned back and shut his eyes. I looked up at the wall clock: two minutes past 11. I looked at my wrist watch: also two minutes past 11. They both said six minutes past when Wolfe opened his eyes.

"From Mr. Cramer's information," he said, "I doubt if that case holds any formidable difficulties."

I had no comment.

"If it were speedily solved," he went on, "your commitment to the dog could be honored, at leisure. Clearly, the simplest way to settle this matter is to find out who killed Mr. Kampf. It may not be much of a job; if it proves otherwise, we can reconsider. An immediate exploration is the thing, and luckily we have a pretext for it. You can go to Arbor Street to get your raincoat, taking Mr. Meegan's with you, and proceed as the occasion offers. The best course would be to bring him here; but, as you know, I rely wholly on your discretion and enterprise in such a juncture."

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"Thank you very much," I said bitterly. "You mean now?"

"Yes."

"They may still have Meegan downtown."

"I doubt if they'll keep him overnight. In the morning they'll probably have him again."

"I'll be hanged." I arose. "No client, no fee — no nothing except a dog with a wide skull for brain room." I went to the hall rack for my hat and Meegan's coat, and beat it.

The rain had ended and the wind was down. Dismissing the taxi at the end of Arbor Street, I walked to Number 29, with the raincoat hung over my arm. There was light behind the curtains of the windows on the ground floor, but none anywhere above, and none in the basement. Entering the vestibule, I inspected the labels in the slots between the mailboxes and the buttons. From the bottom up they read: Talento, Meegan, Aland, and Chaffee. I pushed Meegan's button, put my hand on the doorknob, and waited. No click. I twisted the knob and it wouldn't turn. Another long push on the button, and a longer wait. Nothing doing.

I considered pushing the button of Victor Talento, the lawyer who lived on the ground floor, where light was showing; instead, I voted to wait a while for Meegan, with whom I had an in. I moved to the sidewalk, propped myself against a fire hydrant, and waited.

I hadn't been there long enough to shift position more than a couple of times when the light disappeared on the ground floor of Number 29. A little later the vestibule door opened and a man came out. He turned toward me, gave me a glance as he passed, and kept going.

Thinking it unlikely that any occupant of that house was being extended the freedom of the city that night, I cast my eyes around, and, sure enough, when the subject had gone some thirty paces a figure emerged from an areaway across the street and started strolling after him. I shook my head in disapproval. I would have waited until the guy was ten paces farther. Saul Panzer would have made it ten more than that, but Saul is the best tailer alive.

As I stood deploring that faulty performance, an idea hit me. They might keep Meegan downtown another two hours, or all night, or he might even be up in his bed asleep. This was at least a chance to take a stab at something. I shoved off, in the direction taken by the subject, who was now a block away. Stepping along, I gained on him. A little beyond the corner I came abreast of the city employee, who was keeping to the other side of the street, but I wasn't interested in him. It seemed to me that the subject was upping the stroke a little, so I did, too, and as he reached the next intersection I was beside him.

I said: "Victor Talento?"

"No comment," he said, and kept going. So did I.

"Thanks for the compliment," I

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said, "but I'm not a reporter. My name's Archie Goodwin, and I work for Nero Wolfe. If you'll stop a second I'll show you my credentials."

"I'm not at all interested in your credentials."

"Okay. If you just came out for a breath of air you won't be interested in this, either. Otherwise, you may be. Please don't scream or look around, but you've got a homicide dick on your tail. He's across the street, ninety feet back."

"Yes," he conceded, without changing pace, "that's interesting. Is this your good deed for the day?"

"No. I'm out dowsing for Mr. Wolfe. He's investigating a murder just for practice, and I'm looking for a seam. I thought if I gave you a break you might feel like reciprocating. If you're just out for a walk, forget it, and sorry I interrupted. If you're headed for something you'd like to keep private, maybe you could use some expert advice. In this part of town at this time of night there are only two approved methods for shaking a tail, and I'd be glad to oblige."

He looked it over for half a block, with me keeping step, and then spoke: "You mentioned credentials."

"Right. We might as well stop under that light. The dick will, of course, keep his distance."

We stopped. I got out my wallet and let him have a look at my licenses, detective and driver's. He didn't skimp it, being a lawyer.

"Of course," he said, "I was aware that I might be followed."

"Sure."

"I intended to take precautions. But I suppose it's not always as simple as it seems. I have had no experience at this kind of maneuver. Who hired Wolfe to investigate?"

"I don't know. He says he needs practice."

He stood sizing me up by the street light. He was an inch shorter than I am, and some older, with his weight starting to collect around the middle. He was dark-skinned, with eyes to match.

"I have an appointment," he said.

I waited.

He went on: "A woman phoned me and I arranged to meet her. My wire could have been tapped."

"I doubt it. They're not that fast."

"I suppose not. The woman had nothing to do with the murder, and neither had I, but of course anything I do and anyone I see is suspect. I have no right to expose her to possible embarrassment. I can't be sure of shaking that man off."

I grinned at him. "And me, too."

"You mean you would follow me?"

"Certainly, for practice. And I'd like to see how you handle it."

He wasn't returning my grin. "I see you've earned your reputation, Goodwin. You'd be wasting your time, because this woman has no connection with this business, but I should have known better than to make this appointment. It's only three blocks from here. You might be willing to go and tell her I'm not coming. Yes?"

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"Sure, if it's only three blocks. If you'll return the favor by calling on Nero Wolfe for a little talk. That's what I meant by reciprocating."

He considered it. "Not tonight. I'm all in."

"Tomorrow morning at eleven?"

"Yes, I can make it then."

"Okay." I gave him the address. "Now brief me."

He took a respectable roll of bills from his pocket and peeled off a twenty. "Since you're acting as my agent, you have a right to a fee."

I grinned again. "That's a neat idea, you being a lawyer, but I'm not acting as your agent. I'm doing you a favor on request and expecting one in return. Where's the appointment?"

He put the roll back. "Have it your way. The woman's name is Jewel Jones, and she's at the southeast corner of Christopher and Grove Streets, or will be." He looked at his wrist. "We were to meet there at midnight. She's medium height, slender, dark hair and eyes, very good-looking. Tell her why I'm not coming, and say she'll hear from me tomorrow."

"Right. You'd better take a walk in the other direction to keep the dick occupied, and don't look back."

He wanted to shake hands to show his appreciation, but that would have been just as bad as taking the twenty, since before another midnight Wolfe might be tagging him for murder, so I pretended not to notice. He headed east and I, west, moving right along.

I had to make sure that the dick didn't switch subjects, but I let that wait until I got to Christopher Street. Reaching it, I turned the corner, went twenty feet to a stoop, slid behind it with only my head out, and counted a slow hundred. There were passers-by — a couple and a guy in a hurry — but no dick. I went on a block to Grove Street, passed the intersection, saw no loitering female, continued for a distance, then turned and backtracked. I was on the fifth lap, and it was eight minutes past 12, when a taxi stopped at the corner, a woman got out, and the taxi rolled off.

I approached. The light could have been better, but she seemed to meet the specifications. I stopped and asked, "Jones?" She drew herself up. I said, "From Victor."

She tilted her head back to see my face. "Who are you?" She seemed a little out of breath.

"Victor sent me with a message, but naturally I have to be sure it reaches the right party. I've anteed half of your name and half of his, so it's your turn."

"Who are you?"

I shook my head. "You go first, or no message from Victor."

"Where is he?"

"No. I'll count ten and go. One, two, three, four —"

"My name is Jewel Jones. His is Victor Talento."

"That's the girl. I'll tell you." I did so, giving a complete version of my encounter with Talento, and including, of course, my name and status. By the time I finished she had developed a healthy frown.

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She moved and put a hand on my arm. "Come and put me in a taxi."

I stayed planted. "I'll be glad to, and it will be on me. We're going to Nero Wolfe's place."

"We?" She removed the hand. "You're crazy."

"One will get you ten I'm not. Look at it. You and Talento made an appointment at a street corner, so you had some good reason for not wanting to be seen together tonight. It must have been something fairly urgent. I admit the urgency didn't have to be connected with the murder of Philip Kampf, but it could be. I don't want to be arbitrary. I can take you to a homicide sergeant named Stebbins and you can discuss it with him, or I'll take you to Mr. Wolfe."

She had well-oiled gears. For a second, as I spoke, her eyes flashed like daggers, but then they went soft and appealing. She took my arm again, this time with both hands. "I'll discuss it with you," she said, in a voice she could have used to defrost her refrigerator. "I wouldn't mind that. We'll go somewhere."

I said come on, and we moved, with her hand hooked cozily on my arm. We hadn't gone far, toward Seventh Avenue, when a taxi came along and I flagged it and we got in. I told the driver, "Nine-sixteen West Thirty-fifth," and he started.

"What's that?" Miss Jones demanded.

I told her, Nero Wolfe's house. The poor girl didn't know what to do. If she called me a rat, that wouldn't help her any. If she kicked and screamed, I would merely tell the hackie, Headquarters. Her best bet was to try to thaw me, and if she had had time for a real campaign — say four or five hours — she might conceivably have made some progress, because she had a knack for it.

There just wasn't time enough. The taxi rolled to the curb and I had a bill ready for the driver. I got out, gave her a hand, and escorted her up the seven steps of the stoop. I pushed the button, and in a moment the stoop light shone on us, the chain bolt was released, and the door opened. I motioned her in and followed. Fritz was there.

"Mr. Wolfe up?" I asked.

"In the office." He was giving Miss Jones a look, the look he gives any strange female who enters that house. There is always in his mind the posibility, however remote, that she will bewitch Wolfe into a mania for a mate. I asked him to conduct her to the front room, put my hat and the raincoat on the rack, and went on down the hall to the office.

Wolfe was at his desk, reading; and curled up in the middle of the room, on the best rug in the house, was the dog. The dog greeted me by lifting his head and tapping the rug with his tail. Wolfe greeted me by grunting.

"I brought company," I told him. "Before I introduce her I should —"

"Her? The tenants of that house are all men! I might have known you'd dig up a woman!"

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"I can chase her if you don't want her. This is how I got her." I proceeded, not dragging it out, but including all the essentials. I ended up, "I could have grilled her myself, but it would have been risky. Just in a six-minute taxi ride she had me feeling — uh, brotherly. Do you want her or not?"

"Confound it." His eyes went to his book and stayed there long enough to finish a paragraph. "Very well, bring her."

I crossed to the connecting door to the front room, opened it, and requested, "Please come in, Miss Jones." She came, and as she passed through gave me a wistful smile that might have gone straight to my heart if there hadn't been a diversion. As she entered, the dog suddenly sprang to his feet and made for her, with sounds of unmistakable pleasure. He stopped in front of her, wagging his tail so fast it was only a blur.

"Indeed," Wolfe said. "How do you do, Miss Jones? I am Nero Wolfe. What's the dog's name?"

I claim she was good. The presence of the dog was a complete surprise to her. But without the slightest sign of fluster she put out a hand to give it a gentle pat, then went to the red-leather chair and sat down.

"That's a funny question right off," she said. "Asking me your dog's name."

"Pfui." Wolfe was disgusted. "I don't know what position you were going to take, but from what Mr. Goodwin tells me I would guess you were going to say that the purpose of your appointment with Mr. Talento was a personal matter that had nothing to do with Mr. Kampf or his death, and that you knew Mr. Kampf either slightly or not at all. Now the dog has made that untenable. Obviously, he knows you well, and he belonged to Mr. Kampf. So you knew Mr. Kampf well. If you try to deny that, you'll have Mr. Goodwin and other trained men digging all around you, your past and your present, and that will be extremely disagreeable, no matter how innocent you may be of murder or any other wrongdoing. You won't like that. What's the dog's name?"

She looked at me and I looked back. In good light I would have qualified Talento's specification of "very good-looking." Not that she was unsightly, but she caught the eye more by what she looked than how she looked. It wasn't just something she turned on as needed; it was there even now, when she must have been pretty busy deciding how to handle the situation.

It took her only a few seconds to decide. "His name is Bootsy," she said. The dog, at her feet, lifted his head and wagged his tail.

"Good heavens," Wolfe muttered. "No other name?"

"Not that I know of."

"Your name is Jewel Jones?"

"Yes. I sing in a night club, but I'm not working right now." She made a little gesture, very appealing, but it was Wolfe who had to resist it, not me. "Believe me, Mr. Wolfe, I

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don't know anything about that murder. If I knew anything that could help I'd be perfectly willing to tell you, because I'm sure you're the kind of man who understands, and you wouldn't want to hurt me if you didn't have to."

"I try to understand," Wolfe said dryly. "You knew Mr. Kampf intimately?"

"Yes, I guess so." She smiled, as one understander to another. "For a while I did. Not lately — not for the past two months."

"You met the dog at his apartment on Perry Street?"

"That's right. For nearly a year I was there quite often."

"You and Mr. Kampf quarreled?"

"Oh, no, we didn't quarrel. I just didn't see him any more. I had other — I was very busy."

"When did you see him last?"

"About two weeks ago, at the club. He came to the club once or twice and spoke to me there."

"But no quarrel?"

"No, there was nothing to quarrel about."

"You have no idea who killed him, or why?"

"I certainly haven't."

Wolfe leaned back. "Do you know Mr. Talento intimately?"

"No, not if you mean — of course, we're friends. I used to live there. I had the second-floor apartment."

"At Twenty-nine Arbor Street?"

"Yes."

"For how long? When?"

"For nearly a year. I left there — let's see — about three months ago. I have a little apartment on East Forty-ninth Street."

"Then you know the others, too? Mr. Meegan and Mr. Chaffee and Mr. Aland?"

"I know Ross Chaffee and Jerry Aland, but no Meegan. Who's he?"

"A tenant at Twenty-nine Arbor Street. Second floor."

She nodded. "Well, sure, that's the floor I had." She smiled. "I hope they fixed that rickety table for him. That was one reason I left. I hate furnished apartments, don't you?"

Wolfe made a face. "In principle, yes. I take it you now have your own furniture. Supplied by Mr. Kampf?"

She laughed — more of a chuckle — and her eyes danced. "I see you didn't know Phil Kampf."

"Not supplied by him, then?"

"A great big no."

"By Mr. Chaffee? Or Mr. Aland?"

"No and no." She went very earnest: "Look, Mr. Wolfe. A friend of mine was mighty nice about that furniture, and we'll just leave it. Mr. Goodwin told me what you're interested in is the murder, and I'm sure you wouldn't want to drag in a lot of stuff just to hurt me and a friend of mine, so we'll forget about the furniture."

Wolfe didn't press it. He took a hop. "Your appointment on a street corner with Mr. Talento. What was that about?"

She nodded. "I've been wondering about that — I mean, what I would say when you asked me — because

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I'd hate to have you think I'm a sap, and I guess it sounds like it. I phoned him when I heard on the radio that Phil was killed, there on Arbor Street. I knew Vic still lived there, and I simply wanted to ask him about it."

"You had him on the phone."

"He didn't seem to want to talk about it on the phone."

"But why a street corner?"

This time it was more like a laugh. "Now, Mr. Wolfe, *you're* not a sap. You asked about the furniture, didn't you? Well, a girl with furniture shouldn't be seen with Vic Talento."

"What is he like?"

She fluttered a hand. "Oh, he wants to get close."

Wolfe kept at her until after one o'clock, and I could report it all, but it wouldn't get you any farther than it did him. He couldn't trip her or back her into a corner. She hadn't been to Arbor Street for two months. She hadn't seen Chaffee or Aland or Talento for weeks, and of course not Meegan, since she had never heard of him before. She couldn't even try to guess who had killed Kampf.

The only thing remotely to be regarded as a return on Wolfe's investment of a full hour was her statement that, as far as she knew, there was no one who had both an attachment and a claim to Bootsy. If there were heirs, she had no idea who they were. When she left the chair to go, the dog got up, too. She patted him, and he went with us to the door. I took her to Tenth Avenue and put her in a taxi, and returned.

"Where's Bootsy?" I inquired.

"No," Wolfe said emphatically.

"Okay." I surrendered. "Where's Jet?"

"Down in Fritz's room. He'll sleep there. You don't like him."

"That's not true, but you can have it. It means you can't blame him on me. Anyhow, that will no longer be an issue after Homicide comes in the morning with a document and takes him away."

"They won't come."

"I offer twenty to one. Before noon."

He nodded. "That was, roughly, my own estimate of the probability, so while you were out I phoned Mr. Cramer. I suggested an arrangement, and I suppose he inferred that if he declined the arrangement the dog might be beyond his jurisdiction before tomorrow. I didn't say so, but I may have given him that impression."

"Yeah. You should be more careful."

"So the arrangement has been made. You are to be at Twenty-nine Arbor Street, with the dog, at nine o'clock in the morning. You are to be present throughout the fatuous performance the police have in mind, and keep the dog in view. The dog is to leave the premises with you, before noon, and you are to bring him back here. The police are to make no further effort to constrain the dog for twenty-four hours. While in that house you may find an opportunity to flush something or someone more contributive than Jewel Jones. . . ."

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It was a fine, bright morning. I didn't take Meegan's raincoat, because I didn't need any pretext, and I doubted if the program would offer a likely occasion for the exchange.

The law was there in front waiting for me. The plainclothesman who knew dogs was a stocky, middle-aged guy who wore rimless glasses. Before he touched the dog he asked me its name, and I told him Bootsy.

"A heck of a name," he observed. "Also, that's some leash you've got."

"I agree. His was on the corpse, so I suppose it's in the lab." I handed him my end of the heavy cord. "If he bites you it's not on me."

"He won't bite me. Would you, Bootsy?" He squatted before the dog and started to get acquainted.

Sergeant Purley Stebbins growled a foot from my ear, "He should have bit you when you kidnaped him."

I turned. Purley was half an inch taller than I am and two inches broader. "You've got it twisted," I told him. "It's women that bite me. I've often wondered what would bite you."

We continued exchanging pleasantries, while the dog man, whose name was Larkin, made friends with Bootsy. It wasn't long before he announced that he was ready to proceed. He was frowning. "In a way," he said, "it would be better to keep him on leash after I go in, because Kampf probably did. . . . Or did he? How much do we actually know?"

"To swear to," Purley told him, "very little. But putting it all together from what we've collected, this is how it looks: When Kampf and the dog entered, it was raining and the dog was wet. Kampf removed the leash, either in the ground-floor hall or one of the halls above. He had the leash in his hand when he went to the door of one of the apartments. The tenant of the apartment let him in and they talked. The tenant socked him, probably from behind without warning, and used the leash to finish him. The murderer stuffed the leash in the pocket of the raincoat.

"It took nerve and muscle to carry the body out and down the stairs to the lower hall, but he had to get it out of his place and away from his door, and any of those four could have done it in a pinch. Of course, the dog was already outside, out on the sidewalk. While Kampf was in one of the apartments getting killed, Talento had come into the lower hall and seen the dog and chased it out."

"Then," Larkin objected, "Talento's clean."

"No. Nobody's clean. If it was Talento, after he killed Kampf he went out to the hall and put the dog in the vestibule, went back in his apartment and carried the body out and dumped it at the foot of the stairs, and then left the house, chasing the dog on out to the sidewalk. You're the dog expert. Is there anything wrong with that?"

"Not necessarily. It depends on the dog and how close he was to Kampf. There wasn't any blood."

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"Then that's how I'm buying it. If you want it filled in you can spend the rest of the day with the reports of the other experts and the statements made by the tenants."

"Some other day. That'll do for now. You're going in first?"

"Yeah. Come on, Goodwin." Purley started for the door, but I objected: "I'm staying with the dog."

Purley looked disgusted. "Then keep behind Larkin."

I changed my mind. From behind Larkin the view wouldn't be good. So I went into the vestibule with Purley. The inner door was opened by a homicide colleague, and we crossed to the far side of the small lobby. The colleague closed the door. In a minute he pulled it open again, and Larkin and the dog entered.

Two steps in, Larkin stopped, and so did the dog. No one spoke. The leash hung limp. Bootsy looked around at Larkin. Larkin bent over and untied the cord from the collar, and held it up to show Bootsy he was free. Bootsy came over to me and stood, his head up, wagging his tail.

"Nuts," Purley said, disgusted.

"You know what I really expected," Larkin said. "I never thought he'd show us where Kampf went when they entered yesterday, but I did think he'd go to the foot of the stairs, where the body was found, and I thought he might go on to where the body came from — Talento's door, or upstairs. Take him by the collar, Goodwin, and ease him over to the foot of the stairs."

I obliged. He came without urging, but gave no sign that the spot held any special interest for him. We all stood and watched him. He opened his mouth wide to yawn.

"Fine," Purley rumbled. "Just fine. You might as well go on with it."

Larkin came and fastened the leash to the collar, led Bootsy across the lobby to a door, and knocked. In a moment the door opened, and there was Victor Talento, in a fancy rainbow dressing gown.

"Hello, Bootsy," he said, and reached down to pat.

Purley snapped, "I told you not to speak!"

Talento straightened up. "So you did." He was apologetic. "I'm sorry; I forgot. Do you want to try it again?"

"No. That's all."

Talento backed in and closed the door.

"You must realize," Larkin told Purley, "that a Labrador can't be expected to go for a man's throat. They're not that kind of dog. The most you could expect would be an attitude, or possibly a growl."

"You can have 'em," Purley said. "Is it worth going on?"

"By all means. You'd better go first."

Purley started up the stairs, and I followed him. The upper hall was narrow and not very light, with a door at the rear end and another toward the front. We backed up against the wall opposite the front door to leave enough space for Larkin and Bootsy. They came, Bootsy tag-

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ging, and Larkin knocked. Ten seconds passed before footsteps sounded, and then the door was opened by the specimen who had dashed out of Wolfe's place the day before and taken my coat with him. He was in his shirt sleeves and he hadn't combed his blond hair.

"This is Sergeant Larkin, Mr. Meegan," Purley said. "Take a look at the dog. Have you ever seen it before? Pat it."

Meegan snorted. "Pat it yourself."

"Have you ever seen it before?"

"No."

"Okay; thanks. Come on, Larkin."

As we started up the next flight the door slammed behind us, good and loud. Purley asked over his shoulder, "Well?"

"He didn't like him," Larkin replied from the rear, "but there are lots of people lots of dogs don't like."

The third-floor hall was a duplicate of the one below. Again Purley and I posted ourselves opposite the door, and Larkin came with Bootsy and knocked. Nothing happened. He knocked again, louder, and pretty soon the door opened to a two-inch crack and a squeaky voice came through:

"You've got the dog."

"Right here," Larkin told him.

"Are you there, Sergeant?"

"Right here," Purley answered.

"I told you that dog didn't like me. Once at a party at Phil Kampf's — I told you. I didn't mean to hurt it, but it thought I did. What are you trying to do — frame me?"

"Open the door. The dog's on a leash."

"I won't! I told you I wouldn't!"

Purley moved. His arm, out stiff, went over Larkin's shoulder, and his palm met the door and shoved hard. The door hesitated an instant, then swung open. Standing there, holding to its edge, was a skinny individual in red-and-green striped pajamas. The dog let out a low growl and backed up a little.

"We're making the rounds, Mr. Aland," Purley said, "and we couldn't leave you out. Now you can go back to sleep. As for trying to frame you —" He stopped because the door shut.

"You didn't tell me," Larkin complained, "that Aland had already fixed it for a reaction."

"No, I thought I'd wait and see. One to go." He headed for the stairs.

The top-floor hall had had someone's personal attention. It was no bigger than the others, but it had a nice, clean tan-colored runner, and the walls were painted the same shade and sported a few small pictures. Purley went to the rear door instead of the front, and we made room for Larkin and Bootsy. When Larkin knocked, footsteps responded at once, and the door swung wide open. This was the painter, Ross Chaffee, and he was dressed for it, in an old brown smock. He was by far the handsomest of the tenants — tall, erect, with features he must have enjoyed looking at in the mirror.

I had ample time to enjoy them,

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too, as he stood smiling at us, completely at ease, obeying Purley's prior instructions not to speak. Bootsy was also at ease. When it became quite clear that no blood was going to be shed, Purley asked, "You know the dog, don't you, Mr. Chaffee?"

"Certainly. He's a beautiful animal."

"Pat him."

"With pleasure." He bent gracefully. "Bootsy, do you know your master's gone?" He scratched behind the black ears. "Gone forever, Bootsy, and that's too bad." He straightened. "Anything else? I'm working. I like morning light."

"That's all, thanks." Purley turned to go, and I let Larkin and Bootsy by before following. On the way down the three flights no one had any remarks. As we hit the lower hall Victor Talento's door opened, and he emerged.

"The District Attorney's office telephoned," he said. "Are you through with me? They want me down there."

"We're through," Purley said. "We can run you down."

Talento said that would be fine and he would be ready in a minute. Purley told Larkin to give me Bootsy, and he handed me the leash.

I departed. Outside, the morning was still fine. The presence of two PD cars in front of the scene of a murder had attracted a small gathering, and Bootsy and I were objects of interest as we appeared and started off. We both ignored the stares. We moseyed along, in no hurry, stopping now and then to give Bootsy a chance to inspect something if he felt inclined. At the fourth or fifth stop, more than a block away, I saw the quartet leaving Number 29. Stebbins and Talento took one car, Larkin and the colleague the other, and they rolled off.

I shortened up on Bootsy a little, walked him west until an empty taxi appeared, stopped it, and got in. I took a five-dollar bill from my wallet and handed it to the hackie.

"Thanks," he said with feeling. "For what — down payment on the cab?"

"You'll earn it, brother," I assured him. "Is there somewhere within a block or so of Arbor and Court where you can park for anywhere from thirty minutes to three hours?"

"Not three hours for a finif."

"Of course not." I took out another five and gave it to him. "I doubt if it will be that long."

"There's a parking lot not too far. On the street without a passenger I'll be hailed."

"You'll have a passenger: the dog. I prefer the street. Let's see what we can find."

There are darned few legal-parking spaces in all Manhattan at that time of day, and we cruised around several corners before we found one, on Court Street two blocks from Arbor. He backed into it and I got out, leaving the windows down three inches. I told him I'd be back when he saw me, and headed south, turning right at the second corner.

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There was no police car at 29 Arbor, and no gathering. That was satisfactory. Entering the vestibule, I pushed the button under "Meegan" and put my hand on the knob. No click. Pushing twice more and still getting no response, I tried Aland's button, and that worked. After a short wait the click came, and I entered, mounted two flights, and knocked with authority on Aland's door.

The squeaky voice came through: "Who is it?"

"Goodwin. I was just here with the others. I haven't got the dog."

The door swung slowly to a crack, and then wider. Jerome Aland was still in his gaudy pajamas. "What do you want now?" he asked. "I need some sleep!"

I didn't apologize. "I was going to ask you some questions when I was here before," I told him, "but the dog complicated it. It won't take long." Since he wasn't polite enough to move aside, I had to brush him, skinny as he was, as I went in.

He slid past me, and I followed him across the room to chairs. They were the kind of chairs that made Jewel Jones hate furnished apartments. He sat on the edge of one and demanded, "All right; what is it?"

It was a little tricky. Since he was assuming I was one of the homicide personnel, it wouldn't do for me to know either too much or too little. It would be risky to mention Jewel Jones, because the cops might not have got around to her at all.

"I'm checking some points," I told him. "How long has Richard Meegan occupied the apartment below you?"

"I've told you that a dozen times."

"Not me. I said I'm checking. How long?"

"Nine days. He took it a week ago Tuesday."

"Who was the previous tenant? Just before him."

"There wasn't any. It was empty."

"Empty since you've been here?"

"No, I've told you, a girl had it, but she moved out about three months ago. Her name is Jewel Jones, and she's a fine artist, and she got me my job at the night club where I work now." His mouth worked. "I know what you're doing. You're trying to make it nasty, and you're trying to catch me getting my facts twisted. Bringing that dog here to growl at me — Can I help it if I don't like dogs?"

He ran his fingers, both hands, through his hair. When the hair was messed good he gestured like the night-club comedian he was. "Die like a dog," he said. "That's what Phil did — died like a dog."

"You said," I ventured, "that you and he were good friends."

His head jerked up. "I did not!"

"Maybe not in those words. . . . Why? Weren't you?"

"We were not. I haven't got any good friends."

"You just said that the girl who used to live here got you a job. That sounds like a good friend. Or did she owe you something?"

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"Of course not. Why do you keep bringing her up?"

"I didn't bring her up — you did. I only asked who was the former tenant in the apartment below you. Why? Would you rather keep her out of it?"

"I don't have to keep her out. She's not in it."

"Perhaps not. Did she know Philip Kampf?"

"I guess so. Sure, she did."

"How well did she know him?"

He shook his head. "If Phil was alive you could ask him, and he might tell you. Me, I don't know."

I smiled at him. "All that does, Mr. Aland, is make me curious. Somebody in this house murdered Kampf. So we ask you questions, and when we come to one you shy at, naturally we wonder why. If you don't like talking about Kampf and that girl, think what it could mean. For instance, it could mean that the girl was yours, and Kampf took her away from you, and that was why you killed him when he came here yesterday."

"She wasn't my girl!"

"Uh-huh. Or it could mean that although she wasn't yours, you were under a deep obligation to her, and Kampf had given her a dirty deal; or he was threatening her with something, and she wanted him disposed of, and you obliged. Or of course it could be merely that Kampf had something on you."

"You're in the wrong racket," he sneered. "You ought to be writing TV scripts."

I stuck with him only a few more minutes, having got all I could hope for under the circumstances. Since I was letting him assume that I was a city employee, I couldn't very well try to pry him loose for a trip to Wolfe's place. Also, I had two more calls to make, and there was no telling when I might be interrupted by a phone call or a courier to one of them from downtown. So I left.

I went down a flight to Meegan's door, and knocked, and waited. Just as I was raising a fist to make it louder and better, there were footsteps inside, and the door opened. Meegan was still in his shirt sleeves and still uncombed.

"Well?" he demanded.

"Back again," I said, firmly but not offensively. "With a few questions. If you don't mind?"

"I certainly do mind."

"Naturally. Mr. Talento has been called down to the District Attorney's office. This might possibly save you another trip there."

He side-stepped and I went in. The room was the same size and shape as Aland's, above, and the furniture, though different, was no more desirable. The table against a wall was lopsided, probably the one that Jewel Jones hoped they had fixed for him. I took a chair beside it, and he took another and sat frowning at me.

"Haven't I seen you before?" he wanted to know.

"Sure, we were here with the dog."

"I mean before that. Wasn't it you in Nero Wolfe's office yesterday?"

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"That's right."

"How come?"

I raised my brows. "Haven't you got the lines crossed, Mr. Meegan? I'm here to ask questions, not to answer them. I was in Wolfe's office on business. I often am. Now —"

"He's a fat, arrogant half-wit!"

"You may be right. He's certainly arrogant. Now I'm here on business." I got out my notebook and pencil. "You moved into this place nine days ago. Please tell me exactly how you came to take this apartment."

He glared. "I've told it at least three times."

"I know. This is the way it's done. I'm not trying to catch you in some little discrepancy, but you could have omitted something important. Just assume I haven't heard it before. Go ahead."

He groaned and dropped his head on his hands. Normally, he might not have been a bad-looking guy, with his blond hair and gray eyes and long, bony face; but now, having spent most of the night with Homicide and the D.A., he looked it, especially his eyes, which were red and puffy.

He lifted his head. "I'm a commercial photographer. In Pittsburgh. Two years ago I married a girl named Margaret Ryan. Seven months later she left me. I didn't know whether she went alone or with somebody. She just left. She left Pittsburgh, too — at least I couldn't find her there — and her family never saw her or heard from her. About five months later, about a year ago, a client of mine came back from a trip to New York and said he saw her in a theater here with a man. He spoke to her, but she claimed he was mistaken. He was sure it was her. I came to New York and spent a week looking around, but didn't find her. I didn't go to the police, because I didn't want to. You want a better reason, but that's mine."

"I'll skip that." I was writing in the notebook. "Go ahead."

"Two weeks ago I went to look at a show of pictures at the Fillmore Gallery in Pittsburgh. There was a painting there — an oil — a big one. It was called *Three Young Mares at Pasture*, and it was an interior, a room, with three women in it. One of them was on a couch, and two of them were on a rug on the floor. They were eating apples. The one on the couch was my wife. I was sure of it the minute I saw her, and after I stood and studied it I was surer than ever. There was absolutely no doubt of it."

"We're not challenging that," I assured him. "What did you do?"

"The artist's signature was Ross Chaffee. I went to the gallery office and asked about him. They thought he lived in New York. I had some work on hand I had to finish, and then I came to New York.

"I had no trouble finding Ross Chaffee; he was in the phone book. I went to see him at his studio, here in this house. First, I told him I was interested in that figure in his painting, that I thought she would be just right to model for some photographs

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I wanted to do, but he said that his opinion of photography as an art medium was such that he wouldn't care to supply models for it. He was bowing me out, so I told him how it was. I told him the whole thing. Then he was different. He sympathized with me and said he would be glad to help me if he could, but he had painted that picture more than a year ago, and he used so many different models for his pictures that it was impossible to remember which was which."

Meegan stopped, and I looked up from the notebook. He said aggressively, "I'm repeating that that sounded phony to me."

"Go right ahead. You're telling it."

"I say it was phony. A photographer might use hundreds of models in a year, and he might forget, but not a painter. Not a picture like that. I got a little tactless with him, and then I apologized. He said he might be able to refresh his memory and asked me to phone him the next day. Instead of phoning I went back the next day to see him, but he said he simply couldn't remember and doubted if he ever could. I didn't get tactless again. Coming in the house, I had noticed a sign that there was a furnished apartment to let, and when I left Chaffee I found the janitor and rented it, and moved in. I knew my wife had modeled for that picture, and I knew I could find her. I wanted to be as close as I could to Chaffee and the people who came to see him."

I wanted something, too. I wanted to say that he must have had a photograph of his wife along and I would like to see it, but of course I didn't dare; it was a cinch that he had already either given it to the cops, or refused to, or claimed he didn't have one. So I merely asked, "What progress did you make?"

"Not much. I tried to get friendly with Chaffee, but I didn't get very far. I met the other two tenants, Talento and Aland, but that didn't get me anywhere. Finally I decided I would have to get some expert help, and that was why I went to see Nero Wolfe. You were there, so you know how that came out — that big blob!"

I nodded. "He has dropsy of the ego. What did you want him to do?"

"I've told you."

"Tell it again."

"I was going to have him tap Chaffee's phone."

"That's illegal," I said severely.

"All right; I didn't do it."

I flipped a page of the notebook. "Go back a little. During that week, besides the tenants here, how many of Chaffee's friends and acquaintances did you meet?"

"Just two, as I've told you. A young woman, a model, in his studio one day — I don't remember her name — and a man Chaffee said buys his pictures. His name was Braunstein."

"You're leaving out Philip Kampf."

Meegan leaned forward and put a fist on the table. "Yes, and I'm going on leaving him out. I never saw him or heard of him."

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"What would you say if I said you were seen with him?"

"I'd say you were a dirty liar!" The red eyes looked redder. "As if I wasn't already having enough trouble, now you set on me about the murder of a man I never heard of! You bring a dog here and tell me to pat it!"

I nodded. "That's your hard luck, Mr. Meegan. You're not the first man who's had a murder for company without inviting it." I closed the notebook and put it in my pocket. I rose. "Stick around, please. You may be wanted downtown again."

I would have liked to get more details of his progress, or lack of progress, with Ross Chaffee, and his contacts with the other two tenants, but it seemed more important to have some words with Chaffee before I got interrupted. As I mounted the two flights to the top floor my wrist watch said twenty-eight minutes past ten.

"I know there's no use complaining," Ross Chaffee said, "about these interruptions to my work. Under the circumstances." He was being very gracious about it.

The top floor was quite different from the others. I don't know what his living quarters in front were like, but the studio, in the rear, was big and high and anything but crummy. There were pieces of sculpture around, big and little, and canvases of all sizes were stacked and propped against racks. The walls were covered with drapes, solid gray, with nothing on them. Each of two easels, one much larger than the other, held a canvas that had been worked on. There were several plain chairs and two upholstered ones, and an oversized divan.

I had been steered to one of the upholstered numbers, and Chaffee, still in his smock, had moved a plain one to sit facing me.

"Only don't prolong it unnecessarily," he requested.

I said I wouldn't. "There are a couple of points," I told him, "that we wonder about a little. Of course, it could be merely a coincidence that Richard Meegan came to town looking for his wife, and came to see you, and rented an apartment here, just nine days before Kampf was murdered, but a coincidence like that will have to stand some going over. Frankly, Mr. Chaffee, there are those — and I happen to be one of them — who find it hard to believe that you couldn't remember who modeled for an important figure in a picture you painted."

Chaffee was smiling. "Then you must think I'm lying."

"I didn't say so."

"But you do, of course." He shrugged. "To what end? What deep design am I cherishing?"

"I wouldn't know. You say you wanted to help Meegan find his wife."

"No, not that I wanted to. I was willing to. He is a horrible nuisance."

"It should be worth some effort to get rid of him. Have you made any?"

"I have explained what I did. In a statement, and signed it. I have noth-

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ing to add. I tried to refresh my memory. One of your colleagues suggested that I might have gone to Pittsburgh to look at the picture. I suppose he was being funny."

A flicker of annoyance in his fine dark eyes warned me that I was supposed to have read his statement.

I gave him an earnest eye. "Look, Mr. Chaffee. This thing is bad for all concerned. It will get worse instead of better until we find out who killed Kampf. You men in this house must know things about one another, and maybe some things connected with Kampf, that you're not telling. I don't expect a man like you to pass out dirt just for the fun of it, but any dirt that's connected with this murder is going to come out, and if you are keeping any to yourself you're a bigger fool than you look."

"Quite a speech." He was smiling again.

"Thanks. Now you make one."

"I'm not as eloquent as you are." He shook his head. "No, I don't believe I can help you any. I can't say I'm a total stranger to dirt — that would be smug; but what you're after — no. You have my opinion of Kampf, whom I knew quite well; he was in some respects admirable, but he had his full share of faults. I would say approximately the same of Talento. I have known Aland only casually. I know no more of Meegan than you do. I haven't the slightest notion why any of them might have wanted to kill Philip Kampf. If you expect —"

A phone rang. Chaffee crossed to a table at the end of the divan and answered it. He told it "Yes" a couple of times, and then: "But one of your men is here now. . . . I don't know his name; I didn't ask him. . . . He may be; I don't know. . . . Very well. The District Attorney's office. . . . Yes, I can leave in a few minutes."

He hung up and turned to me. I spoke first, on my feet: "So they want you at the D.A.'s office. Don't tell them I said so, but they'd rather keep a murder in the file till the cows come home than have the squad crack it. If they want my name they know where to ask."

I marched to the door, opened it, and was gone.

I was relieved to find the cab still waiting with its passenger perched on the seat looking out at the scenery. Jet seemed pleased to see me, and during the drive to 35th Street he sat with his rump braced against me for a buttress. The meter said only six dollars and something, but I didn't request any change from the ten I had given the driver. If Wolfe wanted to put me to work on a murder merely because he was infatuated with a dog, let it cost him something.

I noticed that when we entered the office Jet went over to Wolfe, behind his desk, without any sign of bashfulness or uncertainty, proving that the evening before, during my absence, Wolfe had made approaches; probably had fed him something, possibly

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had even patted him. Remarks occurred to me, but I saved them. I might be called on before long to spend some valuable time demonstrating that I had not been guilty of impersonating an officer, and that it wasn't my fault if the murder suspects mistook me for one.

Wolfe inquired, "Well?"

I reported. The situation called for a full and detailed account, and I supplied it, while Wolfe leaned back with his eyes closed. When I came to the end he asked no questions. Instead, he opened his eyes, and began, "Call the —"

I cut him off: "Wait a minute. After a hard morning's work I claim the satisfaction of suggesting it myself. I thought of it long ago. I'll call the gallery in Pittsburgh where Caffee's picture was shown."

"Indeed. It's a shot at random."

"I know it is but I'm calling anyway."

I reached for the phone on my desk and got through to the Fillmore Gallery in no time, but it took a quarter of an hour, with relays to three different people, to get what I was after. I hung up and turned to Wolfe:

"The show ended a week ago yesterday. And I won't have to go to Pittsburgh. The picture was lent by Mr. Herman Braunstein of New York, who owns it. It was shipped back to him by express four days ago. They wouldn't give me Braunstein's address."

"The phone book."

I had it and was flipping the pages. "Here we are. Business on Broad Street, residence on Park Avenue. There's only one Herman."

"Get him."

"I don't think so. It might take all day. Why don't I go to the residence without phoning? The picture's probably there, and if I can't get in you can fire me. I'm thinking of resigning anyhow."

He had his doubts, since it was my idea, but he bought it. After considering the problem a little, I went to the cabinet beneath the bookshelves, got out the Veblex camera, with accessories, and slung the strap of the case over my shoulder. Before going I dialed Talento's number, to tell him not to bother to keep his appointment, but there was no answer. Either he was still engaged at the D.A.'s office or he was on his way to 35th Street, and if he came during my absence that was all right, since Jet was there to protect Wolfe.

A taxi took me to the end of a sidewalk canopy in front of one of the palace hives on Park Avenue in the Seventies, and I undertook to walk past the doorman without giving him a glance, but he stopped me. I said professionally, "Braunstein, taking pictures, I'm late," and kept going, and got away with it. I crossed the luxurious lobby to the elevator, which luckily was there with the door open, said, "Braunstein, please," and the operator shut the door and pulled the lever. We stopped at the twelfth floor, and I stepped out. There was a door

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to the right and another to the left. I turned right without asking, on a fifty-fifty chance, listening for a possible correction from the elevator man, who was standing by with his door open.

It was one of the simplest chores I have ever performed. In answer to my ring, the door was opened by a middle-aged female husky, in uniform with apron, and when I told her I had come to take a picture she let me in, asked me to wait, and disappeared. In a couple of minutes a tall and dignified dame with white hair came through an arch and asked what I wanted. I apologized for disturbing her and said I would deeply appreciate it if she would let me take a picture of a painting which had recently been shown at a Pittsburgh gallery, on loan by Mr. Braunstein. It was called *Three Young Mares at Pasture*. A Pittsburgh client of mine had admired it, and had intended to go back and photograph it for his collection, but the picture was gone before he had got around to it.

She wanted some information, such as my name and address and the name of my Pittsburgh client, which I supplied gladly without a script, and then she led me through the arch into a room not quite as big as Madison Square Garden. It would have been a pleasure, and also instructive, to do a little glomming at the rugs and furniture and especially the dozen or more pictures on the walls, but that would have to wait.

She went across to a picture near the far end, said, "That's it," and lowered herself onto a chair.

It was a nice picture. I had half expected the mares to be without clothes, but they were fully dressed. Remarking that I didn't wonder that my client wanted a photograph of it, I got busy with my equipment, including flash bulbs. She sat and watched. I took four shots from slightly different angles, acting and looking professional, I hoped. Then I thanked her warmly on behalf of my client, promised to send her some prints, and left.

That was all there was to it.

Out on the sidewalk again, I walked west to Madison, turned downtown, and found a drug store. I went into the phone booth, and dialed a number.

Wolfe's voice came: "Yes? Whom do you want?"

I've told him a hundred times that's no way to answer the phone, but he's too pigheaded.

I spoke: "I want you. I've seen the picture, and it glows with color and life; the blood seems to pulsate under the warm skin. The shadows are transparent, with a harmonious blending —"

"Shut up! Yes or no?"

"Yes. You have met Mrs. Meegan Would you like to meet her again?"

"I would. Get her."

I didn't have to look in the phone book for her address, having already done so.

I left the drug store and flagged a taxi. . . .

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There was no doorman problem at the number on East Forty-ninth Street. It was an old brick house that had been painted a bright yellow and modernized, but getting in was a little complicated. Pressing the button marked *Jewel Jones* in the vestibule was easy enough, but then it got more difficult.

A voice crackled from the grille: "Yes?"

"Miss Jones?"

"Yes. Who is it?"

"Archie Goodwin. I want to see you."

"What do you want?"

"Let me in and I'll tell you."

"No. What is it?"

"It's very personal. If you don't want to hear it from me I'll go and bring Richard Meegan, and maybe you'll tell him."

I heard the startled exclamation. After a pause: "Why do you say that? I told you I don't know any Meegan."

"You're 'way behind. I just saw a picture called *Three Young Mares at Pasture*. Let me in."

I turned and put my hand on the knob. There was a click, and I pushed the door and entered. I crossed the little lobby to the self-service elevator, pushed the button marked 5, and ascended. When it stopped, I opened the door and emerged into a tiny foyer. A door was standing open, and on the sill was Miss Jones in a giddy négligée. She started to say something, but I rudely ignored it.

"Listen," I said; "there's no sense in prolonging this. Last night I gave you your pick between Mr. Wolfe and Sergeant Stebbins; now it's either Mr. Wolfe or Meegan. I should think you'd prefer Mr. Wolfe, because he's the kind of man who understands; you said so yourself. I'll wait here while you change, but don't try phoning anybody, because you won't know where you are until you've talked with Mr. Wolfe — and also because their wires are probably tapped."

She stepped to me and put a hand on my arm. "Archie, where did you see the picture?"

"I'll tell you on the way down. Let's go."

She gave the arm a gentle tug. "You don't have to wait out here. Come in and sit down."

I patted her fingers, not wishing to be boorish. "Sorry," I told her, "but I'm afraid of young mares. One kicked me once."

She turned and disappeared into the apartment, leaving the door open.

"Don't call me Mrs. Meegan!" Jewel Jones cried.

Wolfe was in as bad a humor as she was. True, she had been hopelessly cornered, with no weapons within reach, but he had been compelled to tell Fritz to postpone lunch until further notice.

"I was only," he said crustily, "stressing the fact that your identity is not a matter for discussion. Legally, you are Mrs. Richard Meegan. That understood, I'll call you anything you say. Miss Jones?"

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"Yes." She was on the red-leather chair, but not in it. Perched on its edge, she looked as if she were set to spring up and scoot any second.

"Very well," Wolfe regarded her. "You realize, madam, that everything you say will be received skeptically. You are a competent liar. Your offhand denial of acquaintance with Mr. Meegan last night was better than competent. Now. When did Mr. Chaffee tell you that your husband was in town looking for you?"

"I didn't say Mr. Chaffee told me."

"Someone did. Who and when?"

She was hanging on. "How do you know someone did?"

He waggled a finger at her. "I beg you, Miss Jones, to realize the pickle you're in. It is not credible that Mr. Chaffee couldn't remember the name of the model for that figure in his picture. The police don't believe it, and they haven't the advantage of knowing, as I do, that it was you and that you lived in that house for a year, and that you still see Mr. Chaffee occasionally. When your husband came and asked Mr. Chaffee for the name of the model, and Mr. Chaffee pleaded a faulty memory, and your husband rented an apartment there and made it plain that he intended to persevere, it is preposterous to suppose that Mr. Chaffee didn't tell you. I don't envy you your tussles with the police after they learn about you."

"They don't have to learn about me, do they?"

"Pfui. I'm surprised they haven't got to you already, though it's been only eighteen hours. They soon will, even if not through me. I know this is no frolic for you, here with me, but they will almost make it seem so."

She was thinking. Her brow was wrinkled and her eyes stared straight at Wolfe. "Do you know," she asked, "what I think would be the best thing? I don't know why I didn't think of it before. You're a detective, you're an expert at helping people in trouble, and I'm certainly in trouble. I'll pay you to help me. I could pay you a little now."

"Not now or ever, Miss Jones." Wolfe was blunt. "When did Mr. Chaffee tell you that your husband was here looking for you?"

"You won't even listen to me," she complained.

"Talk sense and I will. When?"

She edged back on the chair an inch. "You don't know my husband. He was jealous about me even before we married, and then he was worse. It got so bad I couldn't stand it, and that was why I left him. I knew if I stayed in Pittsburgh he would find me and kill me, so I came to New York. A friend of mine had come here — I mean just a friend. I got a job at a modeling agency and made enough to live on, and I met a lot of people. Ross Chaffee was one of them, and he wanted to use me in a picture and I let him. Of course, he paid me, but that wasn't so important, because soon after that I met Phil Kampf, and he got me a tryout at a night club and I made it. About

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then I had a scare, though. A man from Pittsburgh saw me at a theater and spoke to me, but I told him he was wrong, that I had never been in Pittsburgh."

"That was a year ago," Wolfe muttered.

"Yes. I was a little leery about the night club, appearing in public like that, but months went by and nothing happened. And then all of a sudden Ross Chaffee phoned me that my husband had come and asked about the picture. I begged him not to tell him who it was, and he promised he wouldn't. You see, you don't know my husband. I knew he was trying to find me so he could kill me."

"You've said that twice. Has he ever killed anybody?"

"I didn't say anybody — I said me. I seem to have an effect on men." She gestured for understanding. "They just go for me. And Dick — well, I know him, that's all. I left him a year and a half ago, and he's still looking for me, and that's what he's like. When Ross told me he was here, I was scared stiff. I quit working at the club because he might happen to go there and see me, and I hardly left my apartment till last night."

Wolfe nodded. "To meet Mr. Talento. What for?"

"I told you."

"Yes, but then you were merely Miss Jones. Now you are also Mrs. Meegan. What for?"

"That doesn't change it any. I had heard on the radio about Phil being killed and I wanted to know about it. I rang Ross Chaffee and I rang Jerry Aland, but neither of them answered; so I rang Vic Talento. He wouldn't tell me anything on the phone, but he said he would meet me."

"Did Mr. Aland and Mr. Talento know you had sat for that picture?"

"Sure they did."

"And that Mr. Meegan had seen it and recognized you, and was here looking for you?"

"Yes, they knew all about it. Ross had to tell them; because he thought Dick might ask them if they knew who had modeled for the picture, and he had to warn them not to tell. They said they wouldn't, and they didn't. They're all good friends of mine."

She stopped to open her black leather bag, took out a purse, and fingered its contents. She raised her eyes to Wolfe. "I can pay you forty dollars now, to start. I'm not just in trouble; I'm in danger of my life, really I am. I don't see how you can refuse — You're not listening!"

Apparently he wasn't. With his lips pursed, he was watching the tip of his forefinger make little circles on his desk blotter. Her reproach didn't stop him, but after a moment he moved his eyes to me and said abruptly, "Get Mr. Chaffee."

"No!" she cried. "I don't want him to know —"

"Nonsense," he snapped at her. "Everybody will have to know everything, so why drag it out? . . . Get him, Archie. I'll speak to him."

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I dialed Chaffee's number. I doubted if he would be back from his session with the D.A., but he was. I pitched my voice low so he wouldn't recognize it, and merely told him that Nero Wolfe wished to speak to him. Wolfe took it at his desk.

"Mr. Chaffee? This is Nero Wolfe. I've assumed an interest in the murder of Philip Kampf and have done some investigating. . . . Just one moment, please; don't ring off. Sitting here in my office is Mrs. Richard Meegan, alias Miss Jewel Jones. . . . Please let me finish. I shall, of course, have to detain her and communicate with the police, since they will want her as a material witness in a murder case, but before I do that I would like to discuss the matter with you and the others who live in that house. Will you undertake to bring them here as soon as possible? . . . No, I'll say nothing further on the phone. I want you here, all of you. If Mr. Meegan is balky, you might as well tell him his wife is here —"

She was across to him in a leap that any young mare might have envied, grabbing for the phone and shrieking at it, "Don't tell him, Ross! Don't bring him! Don't —"

My own leap and dash around the end of the desk was fairly good, too. I yanked her back with enough enthusiasm so that I landed in the red-leather chair with her on my lap, and since she was by no means through, I wrapped my arms around her, pinning her arms to her sides, whereupon she started kicking my shins with her heels. She kept on kicking until Wolfe had finished with Chaffee. When he hung up she suddenly went limp against me.

Wolfe scowled at us. "An affecting sight," he snorted.

There were various aspects of the situation. One was lunch. For Wolfe it was unthinkable to have company in the house at mealtime, without feeding him or her, but he certainly wasn't going to sit at table with a female who had just pounced on him and clawed at him. The solution was simple: She and I were served in the dining room and Wolfe ate in the kitchen with Fritz. We were served, but she didn't eat much. She kept listening and looking toward the hall, though I assured her that care would be taken to see that her husband didn't kill her on these premises.

A second aspect was the reaction of three of the Arbor Street tenants to their discovery of my identity. I handled that myself. When the doorbell rang and I admitted them, at a quarter past two, I told them I would be glad to discuss my split personality with any or all of them later, if they still wanted to, but they would have to file it until Wolfe was through. Victor Talento had another beef that he wouldn't file — that I had double-crossed him on the message he had asked me to take to Jewel Jones. He wanted to get nasty about it and demanded a private talk with Wolfe, but I told him to go climb a rope.

I also had to handle the third aspect,

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which had two angles. There was Miss Jones's theory that her husband would kill her on sight, which might or might not be well-founded; and there was the fact that one of them had killed Kampf and might go to extremes if pushed. On that I took three precautions: I showed them the Carley .38 I had put in my pocket and told them it was loaded; I insisted on patting them from shoulders to ankles; and I kept Miss Jones in the dining room until I had them seated in the office, on a row of chairs facing Wolfe's desk. When he was in his chair behind his desk I went across the hall for her and brought her in.

Meegan jumped up and started for us. I stiff-armed him, and made it good. His wife got behind me. Talento and Aland left their chairs, presumably to help protect her. Meegan was shouting, and so were they. I detoured with her around back of them and got her to a chair at the end of my desk, and when I sat down I was in an ideal spot to trip anyone headed for her. Talento and Aland had pulled Meegan down onto a chair between them, and he sat staring at her.

"With that hubbub over," Wolfe said, "I want to be sure I have the names right." His eyes went from left to right. "Talento, Meegan, Aland, Chaffee. Is that correct?"

I told him yes.

"Then I'll proceed." He glanced up at the wall clock. "Twenty hours ago Philip Kampf was killed in the house where you gentlemen live. The circumstances indicate that one of you killed him. But I won't rehash the multifarious details which you have already discussed at length with the police; you are familiar with them. I have not been hired to work on this case; the only client I have is a dog, and he came to my office by chance. However —"

The doorbell rang. I asked myself if I had put the chain bolt on, and decided I had. Through the open door to the hall I saw Fritz passing to answer it. Wolfe started to go on, but was annoyed by the sound of voices, and stopped. He shut his eyes and compressed his lips, while the audience sat and looked at him.

Then Fritz appeared in the doorway and announced: "Inspector Cramer, sir."

Wolfe's eyes opened. "What does he want?"

"I told him you are engaged. He says he knows you are — that the four men were followed to your house and he was notified. He says he expected you to be trying some trick with the dog, and he knows that's what you are doing, and he intends to come in and see what it is. Sergeant Stebbins is with him."

Wolfe grunted. "Archie, tell — No. You'd better stay where you are. Fritz, tell him he may see and hear what I'm doing, provided he gives me thirty minutes without interruptions or demands. If he agrees to that, bring them in."

"Wait!" Ross Chaffee was on his feet. "You said you would discuss it

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with us before you communicated with the police."

"I haven't communicated with them. They're here."

"You told them to come!"

"No. I would have preferred to deal with you men first, and then call them, but here they are, and they might as well join us. Bring them, Fritz, on that condition."

"Yes, sir."

Fritz went. Chaffee thought he had something more to say, decided he hadn't, and sat down. Talento said something to him, and he shook his head. Jerry Aland, much more presentable now that he was combed and dressed, kept his eyes fastened on Wolfe. For Meegan, apparently, there was no one in the room but him and his wife.

Cramer and Stebbins marched in, halted three paces from the door, and took a survey.

"Be seated," Wolfe invited them. "Luckily, Mr. Cramer, your usual chair is unoccupied."

"Where's the dog?" Cramer demanded.

"In the kitchen. It's understood that you will be merely a spectator for thirty minutes?"

"That's what I said."

"Then sit down. But you should have one piece of information. You know the gentlemen, of course, but not the lady. Her current name is Miss Jewel Jones. Her legal name is Mrs. Richard Meegan."

"Meegan?" Cramer stared. "The one in the picture Chaffee painted?"

"That's right. Please be seated."

"Where did you get her?"

"That can wait. No interruptions and no demands. Confound it, sit down!"

Cramer went and lowered himself onto the red-leather chair. Purley Stebbins got one of the yellow ones and planted it behind Chaffee and Aland.

Wolfe regarded the quartet. "I was about to say, gentlemen, that it was something the dog did that pointed to the murderer for me. But before —"

"What did it do?" Cramer cut in.

"You know all about it," Wolfe told him coldly. "Mr. Goodwin related the events to you exactly as they happened. If you interrupt again, by heaven, you can take them all down to headquarters — not including the dog — and stew it out yourself!"

He went back to the four: "But before I come to the dog, another thing or two. I offer no comment on your guile with Mr. Meegan. You were all friends of Miss Jones's, and you refused to disclose her to a husband whom she had abandoned and professed to fear. I will even concede that there was a flavor of gallantry in your conduct. But when Mr. Kampf was murdered and the police swarmed in, it was idiotic to try to keep her out of it. They were sure to get to her. I got to her first, only because of Mr. Goodwin's admirable enterprise and characteristic luck."

He shook his head at them. "It was also idiotic of you to assume that Mr. Goodwin was a police officer, and

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admit him and answer his questions, merely because he had been present during the abortive experiment with the dog. You should have asked to see his credentials. None of you had any idea who he was. Even Mr. Meegan, who had seen him in this office in the morning, was bamboozled. I mention this to anticipate any possible official complaint that Mr. Goodwin impersonated an officer. You know he didn't. He merely took advantage of your unwarranted assumption."

He shifted in his chair. "Another thing: Yesterday morning Mr. Meegan called here by appointment to ask me to do a job for him. With his first words I gathered that it was something about his wife. I don't take that kind of work, and I was blunt with him. He was offended. He rushed out in a temper, grabbing a hat and raincoat from the rack in the hall, and he took Mr. Goodwin's coat instead of his own. Late in the afternoon Mr. Goodwin went to Arbor Street with the coat that had been left in error, to exchange it. He saw that in front of Number 29 there were collected two police cars, a policeman on duty, some people, and a dog. He decided to postpone his errand and went on by, after a brief halt during which he patted the dog. He walked home, and had gone nearly two miles when he discovered that the dog was following him. He brought the dog in a cab the rest of the way, to his house and this room."

He flattened a palm on his desk. "Now. Why did the dog follow Mr. Goodwin through the turmoil of the city? Mr. Cramer's notion that the dog was enticed is poppycock. Mr. Goodwin is willing to believe, as many men are, that he is irresistible both to dogs and to women, and doubtless his vanity impeded his intellect, or he would have reached the same conclusion I did. The dog didn't follow him; it followed the coat. You ask, as I did, how to account for Mr. Kampf's dog following Mr. Meegan's coat. I couldn't. I can't. Then, since it was unquestionably Mr. Kampf's dog, it couldn't have been Mr. Meegan's coat. It is better than a conjecture — it is next thing to a certainty — *that it was Mr. Kampf's coat!*"

His gaze leveled at the deserted husband. "Mr. Meegan. Some two hours ago I learned from Mr. Goodwin that you maintain that you had never seen or heard of Mr. Kampf. That was fairly conclusive, but before sending for you I had to verify my conjecture that the model who had sat for Mr. Chaffee's picture was your wife. I would like to hear it straight from you. Did you ever meet Philip Kampf alive?"

Meegan was meeting the gaze. "No."

"Don't you want to qualify that?"

"No."

"Then where did you get his raincoat?"

Meegan's jaw worked. He said, "I didn't have his raincoat, or if I did I didn't know it."

"That won't do. I warn you, you are in deadly peril. The raincoat that

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you brought into this house and left here is in the hall now, there on the rack. It can easily be established that it belonged to Mr. Kampf and was worn by him. Where did you get it?"

Meegan's jaw worked some more. "I never had it, if it belonged to Kampf. This is a dirty frame. You can't prove that's the coat I left here."

Wolfe's voice sharpened: "One more chance. Have you any explanation of how Kampf's coat came into your possession?"

"No, and I don't need any."

He may not have been pure boob. If he hadn't noticed that he wore the wrong coat home — and he probably hadn't, in his state of mind — this had hit him from a clear sky and he had no time to study it.

"Then you're done for," Wolfe told him. "For your own coat must be somewhere, and I think I know where. In the police laboratory. Mr. Kampf was wearing one when you killed him and pushed his body down the stairs — and that explains why, when they were making that experiment this morning, the dog showed no interest in the spot where the body had lain. It had been enveloped, not in his coat but in yours. If you won't explain how you got Mr. Kampf's coat, then explain how he got yours. Is that also a frame?"

Wolfe pointed a finger at him. "I note that flash of hope in your eye, and I think I know what it means. But your brain is lagging. If, after killing Kampf, you took your raincoat off of him and put on him the one that you thought was his, that won't help you any. For in that case the coat that was on the body is Mr. Goodwin's, and certainly that can be established, and how would you explain that? It looks hopeless, and —"

Meegan was springing up, but before he even got well started Purley's big hands were on his shoulders, pulling him back and down.

And Jewel Jones was babbling, "I told you he would kill me! I knew he would! He killed Phil!"

Wolfe snapped at her, "How do you know he did?"

Judging by her eyes and the way she was shaking, she would be hysterical in another two minutes. Meanwhile, she poured it out:

"Because Phil told me — he told me he knew Dick was here looking for me, and he knew how afraid I was of him, and he said if I wouldn't come back to him he would tell Dick where I was. I didn't think he really would — I didn't think Phil could be as mean as that — and I wouldn't promise.

"But yesterday morning he phoned me and told me he had seen Dick and told him he thought he knew who had posed for that picture. He said he was going to see him again in the afternoon and tell him about me if I didn't promise, and so I promised. I thought if I promised, it would give me time to decide what to do. But Phil must have gone to see Dick again, anyway."

"Where had they met in the morning?"

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"At Phil's apartment, he said. And he said — that's why I know Dick killed him — he said Dick had gone off with his raincoat, and he laughed about it and said he was willing for Dick to have his raincoat if he could have Dick's wife" She was shaking harder now. "And I'll bet that's what he told Dick! I'll bet he said I was coming back to him and he thought that was a good trade — a raincoat for a wife! That was like Phil!"

She giggled. It started with a giggle, and then the valves burst open and here it came. When something happens in that office to smash a woman's nerves — as it has more than once — it usually falls to me to deal with it. But that time three other guys, led by Ross Chaffee, were on hand, and I was glad to leave Jewel Jones to them. As for Wolfe, he skedaddled. If there is one thing on earth he absolutely will not be in a room with, it's a woman in eruption. He got up and marched out. As for Meegan, Purley and Cramer had him.

When they left with him, they didn't take the dog. To relieve the minds of any of you who have the notion, which I understand is widespread, that it makes a dog neurotic to change its name, I might add that he responds to "Jet" now as if his mother had started calling him that before he had his eyes open.

As for the raincoat, Wolfe had been right about the flash in Meegan's eye. Kampf had been wearing Meegan's raincoat when he was killed, and of course that wouldn't do, so after strangling him Meegan had taken it off and put on the one he thought was Kampf's. Only, it was mine. As a part of the D.A.'s case I went down to headquarters and identified it. At the trial it helped the jury to decide that Meegan deserved the big one. After that was over I suppose I could have claimed it, but the idea didn't appeal to me. My new coat is a different color.

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Marc Brandel was educated in France, Switzerland, and England. During World War II he served in the merchant marine and at one time or another has traveled through most of the world. A true cosmopolitan, he knows the sights, sounds, and smells of Europe, Africa, India, Persia, and a great part of North and Central America. About ten years ago he became a full-time writer, dividing his work among novels, short stories, and occasional articles. Surely his background and experiences have supplied him with an inexhaustible treasury of ideas and plot incidents, for in addition to his globe-trotting, Mr. Brandel has been a commercial sculptor, a teacher, and a movie technician; and more recently, he has done fine work in the field of TV . . . So we are happy to welcome Marc Brandel to the pages of EQMM, with a story that has multiple mysteries not all of which, we remark with malice aforethought, are resolved . . .

12. IT COULD HAPPEN TO ANYONE

by MARC BRANDEL

I WANT TO MAKE THIS CLEAR RIGHT away: I didn't get mixed up in this thing on purpose. I'm not one of those slick, hardboiled characters mystery authors like to write about. As a matter of fact I'm timid, and I'm not ashamed to admit it.

Until today I had never been mixed up in anything more far-fetched than the Quartermaster Corps back in '43.

Until an hour ago I had never worried about anything more serious than losing my job.

And now I'm sitting here sweating. It's cold in the apartment, too — I think that new superintendent drinks — it's just nervousness that's making me perspire. I'm bewildered and scared and confused and I don't know what to do. There doesn't seem to be anything I can do except wait. Wait for the phone or the doorbell to ring. Wait for whoever he is.

And yet I can't see how I deserved to get into this mess. I can't see how it was really my fault. It could have happened to anyone . . .

It all started this morning, or rather at lunch time, and all because it was raining. If it hadn't been raining I'd have had lunch as usual at Chester's Restaurant. The hot roast-beef sandwich is very good there. But it's five blocks to Chester's from the advertising agency where I work, so I put on my raincoat and dashed across the street to Pierre's instead.

Pierre's is one of those shiny places

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with tables around the walls and a man who meets you in the lobby. It isn't the kind of place I can afford very often, so I thought I might as well make an occasion of it and have a cocktail before lunch.

I checked my raincoat at the little box in the hall, followed the manager to a table near the kitchen, and ordered a Martini. I had two of them. That was my real mistake, I suppose. It probably had quite a lot to do with what happened next, because the Martinis didn't make me hungry the way they're supposed to. In fact, I had a very light lunch and even after the coffee I still felt sort of free and not reckless exactly, but not at all timid either.

That's when I first saw her — as I was finishing my coffee. She must have been eating in the other room or I would have noticed her before. She was very noticeable. She was the kind of a girl who might have been an assistant editor on a chic fashion magazine — she had on one of those coy hats and those long white gloves people on fashion magazines wear — except that she was just a little too spectacular. Her hair was too blonde, her complexion too perfect, her clothes too expensive.

The funny thing was she was walking straight toward me and she was smiling the way my boss does when he's meeting a new sponsor.

"Why, hullo," she called when she was still a yard or two away. "Where have you been hiding yourself?"

I glanced over my shoulder. There was nothing behind me but the wall. She was talking to me, so I stood up.

"Hullo," I said. She was even more breathtaking close up. I fumbled with the chair beside me, and she sat down.

"I can only stay a moment," she said. "But it's so wonderful to see you again." She took my hand and squeezed it in her cool white gloves.

I'd never seen her before in my life. I should have told her so at once, of course. But you know how it is. You go along through life meeting the kind of girls you're naturally cut out for, and then one day you have two Martinis before lunch and something like this happens to you. . . . I squeezed her hand back.

"Peter's with me," she said, sort of wrinkling here eyes.

I looked up. She was right. There was a young man standing right behind her.

"Peter," she said. "You remember Jim."

That startled me even more than the young man's sudden appearance had. Because the strange thing is that although my name's Charles there had been a time years ago in school when several people *had* called me Jim.

"Sure," the young man said. "Sure. How are you, Jim?" He held out his hand in a friendly way, and I took it. I didn't like him a bit. He was a large young man in a gray tweed suit. He looked as though he might have played football for one of the big Eastern colleges, except that there was something vaguely phony about

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him. His suit was too tweedy, his hair too crew cut, his tie too loose.

"Hi," I said.

He leaned a little over the table. "I'm afraid we'd better be getting along, Alice," he told her. And then turning to me: "We've got to get back to the Gosling and pack. We're leaving for the Coast tonight."

It struck me then that was exactly what I meant about him. He didn't have to tell me he could afford to stay at the Gosling. He could have said "the hotel" and left it at that.

I stood up, too. "Well, it was nice seeing you both," I began, trying to edge away. But when I'd got clear of the table I found I was still with them. Peter put his hand on my shoulder as we started for the door.

"Where you been keeping yourself, Jim?"

"Oh, around." The Martinis were beginning to wear off now. I just wanted to get away before they found out I wasn't Jim after all. Not their Jim anyway. I got my coat check out of my pocket.

"Here. Let me." He took the coat check out of my hand before I could stop him. I was left standing in the lobby with Alice while he got the coats. I watched him give the checks to the girl behind the barrier.

"I almost wish we weren't going now." Alice was wrinkling her eyes again.

"So do I." I stood smiling uneasily at her until Peter got back with my raincoat and his own expensive topcoat. He started to help me on with mine, but I took it out of his hands and tossed it over my arm.

"Well, so long," I said. "It was certainly swell seeing you."

It had stopped raining when I got outside, so I just carried my raincoat back to the office over my arm and hung it in its usual place on the stand behind my door.

It wasn't, consequently, until I was leaving at 6 that I had it on again and even then I was halfway down in the elevator before I noticed the package in the pocket.

It was a long manila envelope. It felt as though it was filled with papers. I took it out and looked at it, wondering where it had come from. There was no name or address on it. And then I saw that it wasn't stuck down, just fastened with the clip. I opened the flap and looked inside.

I almost fainted, right there in the elevator. It wasn't paper it was filled with. It was money. Great wads of bills. I closed the envelope's flap fast and took the next elevator back up to my office. Then I locked the door, took out the money, and counted it. I counted it twice. Two thousand three hundred and sixty-five dollars, it added up to.

It didn't take me long to decide what to do next. I remembered Peter getting my coat from the check room. I didn't know what their racket was, or why they had slipped all that money into my pocket, or what I was supposed to do with it. I didn't care. All I knew was that I didn't want any part of it.

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I got a cab and went straight to the Hotel Gosling.

It took me quite a while to find the number of their room. I didn't know their last names, only their first, but I could describe them pretty accurately, and neither of them was hard to describe. I was afraid they might have checked out already, too. But they hadn't. Both of them were in the room when I walked in. There were suitcases all over the floor, and Peter was putting some shirts into another one on the bed.

He looked up and smiled when he saw me.

"Well, look who's come to see us off," he said. "Hi, Jim."

I didn't smile back. "I don't know what your racket is," I said. "And I don't want to. But in case you made some kind of mistake about who I was, I never saw either of you before in my life. Here." And I threw the envelope onto the bed.

He hardly seemed to glance at it. He just stood there looking at me with a frozen smile on his face, his large hands hanging loosely at his sides. He was a lot bigger than I am.

I turned and walked out of the room as fast as I could. I almost ran down the hall to the elevator.

I felt pretty good. I felt I had done the best thing possible and got myself out of what might have been a thoroughly nasty business very well.

I stopped and had a good dinner at a place on Third Avenue and then walked slowly home.

I felt pretty good until just about an hour ago.

I had run out of cigarettes and I happened to remember that there was a half pack in my raincoat. I went to the closet and began to feel through the pockets, looking for it.

There weren't any cigarettes in the coat, or anything else. But that didn't bother me for long. I stopped thinking about cigarettes as soon as I got to the inside pocket and saw the store label stitched on it.

It wasn't my coat!

Yes, of course I called the hotel. They had checked out a couple of hours before. They must have checked out as soon as they looked in the envelope. And they didn't leave anything at the desk either. No messages. No package. No forwarding address.

So what do I do now? What can I do — except sit here and worry. And wait. Wait to see what happens next.

And I know what that'll be.

I keep getting up and looking at the raincoat again, thinking maybe it might be mine after all. But I'm just trying to kid myself, doing that. I know it isn't mine. Somebody else has got mine. And he must know it by now. He couldn't help it.

Mine had my name in it.

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If we remember correctly it was Lord Byron who first said that "truth is stranger than fiction." Roy Vickers's "inverted" detective stories create such an illusion of reality — they seem so genuinely to have happened — that we read them more as truth than fiction. With this "suspension of disbelief" so strong (no mean accomplishment on Mr. Vickers's part), we can't help thinking that stories like those of the Department of Dead Ends are really case histories in fictional form. Take Mr. Vickers's newest story, "A Woman of Principle": surely it is one of the strangest, and yet truest-sounding, murder stories we have read in a long time — one of the strangest, and yet truest-sounding, tales of a love triangle ever conceived. We guarantee you will be fascinated — even if to some of you it will be a horrid kind of fascination . . .

13. A WOMAN OF PRINCIPLE

by ROY VICKERS

MARGARET WHINLEY'S MOTHER, A widow, was a crank, publicly disowned by the Movement which she was held to discredit by her excesses — namely the Movement to abolish the death penalty.

From the age of seven, Margaret was not infrequently kept from school to wait outside a prison in the early morning, the purpose being not ghoulish but propagandist. With a handful of others her mother would weep a little, bluster a little, and distribute pamphlets, produced at her own expense. Then they would return to their comfortable home in the suburbs, which was normal except for the ever-growing pile of pamphlets on the hall table which emphasized the physical and psychological horrors of a judicial execution, with illustrations.

The reason for Margaret's absences became known at school. Whether she was envied or pitied, she was labeled "odd" — which she was not. She escaped unpopularity but could make no close friends. In adolescence she was withdrawn, a little self-righteous and inclined to talk like a governess. She never read about crime nor discussed it of her own free will. Deep down in her was implanted a conviction that to hang a murderer was itself a form of murder. It was more than an opinion — a first principle, the kind of thing one need never discuss.

When Margaret was twenty-two her mother died, leaving a small capital sum which yielded less than the girl's salary as a first-class typist. Good luck enabled her to obtain a suitable

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flat, but she soon found that living alone was too much for her. She invited Eileen Revers to share her flat.

Eileen came from the West country — the only one of a large family to prefer town life. They were of the same physical type — each a little taller than the average, with lithe, well-formed bodies and good coloring — a couple of unobtrusively good-looking girls.

A warm friendship grew up, giving Margaret something she had wanted and needed all her life. For two years, working for the same company, they were content with each other and untroubled by problems of their future. They had interests in common and interests which they shared in chatter. No confidences were withheld — until Eileen fell in with James Grantham.

Eileen's love story follows a familiar pattern of disaster. At the beginning, she told Margaret everything she felt about him, though she never mentioned how and where she had met him. His parents, she said, were in Washington, his father being a minor embassy official. James was, himself, she said, "connected with" the diplomatic service — which meant, she further explained, that he had very interesting work, with the drawback that he could never quite call his time his own.

Like Eileen herself, Margaret swallowed it whole. Margaret knew surprisingly little about men — she had no brothers, not even any male cousins. A few noncommittal kisses at parties had taught her less than nothing.

James Grantham became one of the interests that were shared in chatter. Margaret enjoyed the very nearly secret anecdotes "connected with" the diplomatic service. Her interest was so sympathetic that, in a sense, she shared Eileen's lover. She could imagine herself in Eileen's place, sitting with a shadowy James Grantham in the modest little restaurant, or at the cinema, perhaps holding hands. Quite often, she dreamed of this man whom she had not yet seen.

One evening, without premeditation, she interrupted one of the anecdotes about James Grantham.

"Eileen! I've heard so much about him that I feel I know him quite well. I must meet him! Bring him here to supper on Saturday night, and I'll put up cold chicken and a sherry trifle," she invited. "And we ought to keep some gin on the premises. I'll see to that."

Margaret bought a dress for the occasion. But there was no occasion. Eileen came home unattended because James Grantham, she said, had been suddenly required to go on duty. The diplomatic service was like that. You never knew. Margaret took it, nearly, at its face value. Weeks slipped by with little change.

About the end of March, though Eileen had never announced that he had proposed marriage, the chatter veered to homemaking, with special reference to a wife whose husband could not keep regular hours.

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Margaret once more invited Eileen to bring him to supper — this time suggesting a date a fortnight hence, with alternatives. But again Eileen was the mouthpiece of his regrets.

"I know it looks rude to you, Margaret, and it's a bit thick for me. But it's awful for Jim. He had been looking forward to coming, and he nearly *cried* when he found at the last minute that he couldn't make it."

"It's all right, darling." Margaret didn't believe that Grantham had nearly cried. For one disloyal instant she was ready to doubt whether he had ever received the invitation. The governess element in her had taken charge.

"Eileen, have your people ever met him?"

"It's been too difficult to fix anything. If he had ordinary office hours —"

"*Quite* so. Don't you think, dear, that in fairness to yourself and those who care for you —"

"If you'll let me finish — Mother and Dad have asked him to stay for the first fortnight in June. I've arranged to take my holiday then, and we shall go down together."

There were no more anecdotes and no more chatter about homemaking, but Margaret barely noticed the change. Her mental picture of James Grantham was unaffected by his odd behavior in the matter of invitations. His shadow continued to beckon her to imaginative adventure.

In the first week in June, Eileen set off with an affectionate, almost tearful farewell. Ten days later, when Margaret returned from the office, she found Eileen in the living room.

"Darling! Is it really you?"

Eileen was sitting upright, unnaturally still, and unresponsive.

"I've made a fool of myself, Margaret . . . Jim . . ."

Eileen looked tired, almost haggard.

"Don't get up," insisted Margaret, "I'll get you some tea."

"Not tea! We've still got that gin, haven't we?"

Margaret produced the bottle which had been bought for James Grantham.

"I told you a lie about our going to see my parents. We're at a beach bungalow at Thadbourne. We've been lovers for months."

The cork slipped from Margaret's hand. While she picked it up, she felt embarrassment — as if it were she herself who had made the confession.

"And now you've had a row and he's left you?"

"No, he hasn't. We haven't even had the row — yet! He doesn't know I know a thing. He's up here in London today and he'll be back before midnight. I'm going down on the 7:10, and I shall be the one to make the row."

"Do you think, dear, one can ever be justified in —"

"Diplomatic service, he told me, but I had my suspicions weeks ago. His yarns began not to add up. After he'd gone this morning, I happened to put my hand in his dressing-gown pocket."

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Eileen rummaged in a shopping bag and brought out an envelope, from which she drew a headed memo slip.

" 'Eshelby & Co., Sanitary Manufacturers Agents, 51, Blucher Street, London, E. 1.' " Margaret read aloud. " 'Please meet me at Customs' office at 11:30 A.M. Wednesday 12th. inst., with van Rijnder's invoice viz. 1,000 Lavatory Basin Bracket Size B.' "

"Diplomatic service!" exclaimed Eileen. "Diplomatic not to mention it to your friends!" She replaced the slip in the shopping bag. "I don't care what a man's job is as long as it's straight. But if one lie, why not another? What about his father in Washington? And besides that — for all I know, he — he may have a wife!"

There had been a note of dread in the last words which puzzled Margaret.

"But you don't want to marry a man who tells you snobbish little lies." As Eileen stared, Margaret plunged on. "I know you think I'm a prude but I'm not. I don't see anything very dreadful in living with a man you think you love — provided, of course —"

"*Provided of course!*" echoed Eileen. After a long pause she went on, "If there isn't a wife, he'll have to marry me right away. I don't mind, really. I do still love him, sort of, and I could manage him into making something of himself."

She enlarged on the theme of rebuilding James Grantham until she had to dash for her train.

Half an hour later, Margaret found a shopping bag which Eileen had left behind. She examined the contents. Drapers' parcels and two glass jars of delicatessen. She came upon the envelope containing the memo — hating it as the instrument of exposure. Eileen had made too much of it. After all, it was only a form of show-off, harmless in itself. She would not enclose the envelope with the draperies — it might reveal to Grantham that Eileen had rifled his pockets. On the other hand, Eileen might wonder whether she had left it lying about.

Dear Eileen, she wrote, *I thought you might be needing the things you bought, so am forwarding them herewith, except the glass jars. I am keeping your note about the sanitary fittings until we meet again — which I hope will be soon — with lots of good news. — Margaret.*

She put the envelope containing the memo into her purse, for return to Eileen at their next meeting — then posted the parcel, addressed to *Mrs. Grantham.*

By the following afternoon, when the news broke, Margaret was able to persuade herself that she had had a premonition of disaster — that she had "known" she had been speaking to Eileen for the last time. Certainly the fact of Eileen's death brought tears, but no great shock of surprise. That death should come to her by manual strangulation seemed to have a logic of its own. Eileen had probably maddened him with her taunts.

She studied the report in the eve-

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ning papers. It was the same as all those other crimes — crimes of passion, Mother used to call them. (*You'll understand it better when you're older.*) She was older now and did understand it. (. . . *they really do see red — they're sick men, not responsible for their actions — so if we have breakfast at half-past six, dear, we shall be at the prison in nice time.*)

Her eye slid off the photograph of Eileen to one of an elderly woman, a Miss Stanmore, owner of the bungalow. She had personally let it to Grantham, who had paid a month's rent in cash. She had not taken references as the couple had seemed so thoroughly respectable.

The return address on the parcel brought the police to the flat in quest of a photograph of Grantham.

"I've never seen one — I've never even seen him," said Margaret. "That was her room, if you'd like to search it."

When they failed to find a photograph they searched the flat, at Margaret's invitation, on the chance of a mislaid letter, or even an envelope.

"There was an old portable typewriter at the bungalow." Detective-Inspector Curwen showed her a specimen of its writing, indicating a misalignment, but she could give no help. To the best of her belief, Grantham had never written to Eileen.

"Any idea what his job was, Miss Whinley?"

"I know he told her he was in the diplomatic service. But she had discovered it wasn't true. She had found him out in other lies and she was very unhappy. That's why she came here yesterday and confessed to me she was living with him."

When the detective had gone Margaret, happening to open her purse, caught sight of the envelope containing instructions concerning the lavatory basin brackets.

"Funny I didn't think of it when he asked me what Grantham's job was. I wonder what I ought to do?" She knew what the law required her to do — join in the hunt. (*The pitiful spectacle of a half-demented creature trying to outwit the intelligence and organized might of the police.*)

She shifted her compact and her comb and her handkerchief on top of the envelope so that she need not see it every time she opened her bag.

It was a popular murder. There was the previous innocence and respectability of the victim — attested by Margaret in an interview extracted from her on the pavement as she was leaving for the office; there was the description of Grantham which fitted thousands — the man sitting next to you on the underground; there was the ambivalent hope that the hunted man would keep running and that he would be caught.

Margaret, who had offered no material evidence, was not required to attend the inquest. After the funeral, Eileen's parents called on Margaret, who told them all they wished to know.

Mrs. Revers asked all the questions.

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She began by putting herself at unnecessary pains to explain that she did not hold Margaret responsible, but she ended by saying that events might have taken a different course if Eileen's parents had been warned of the attachment to an obviously undesirable man.

"That's nonsense," said Mr. Revers, speaking almost for the first time. "Miss Whinley asked the man here and he wouldn't come. You couldn't expect her to sneak on her friend." In the hall, as they were leaving, he summed up. "I shall pray that man gets caught and hanged. It's not vengeance — not altogether. As long as he's at large, he may kill another poor girl who trusts him."

The words lingered with Margaret. Grantham might kill another girl. That was an aspect of murder which had not been emphasized in the pamphlets dealing with the horrors of judicial execution.

After the inquest, The Bungalow Murder began to fade out of the news. *The Reflector* summarized it as an unsolved mystery, pointing out that the police had nothing to work on. At Thadbourne, a number of persons had noticed the girl and the fact that she had a male companion; but only one person — the elderly lady who owned the bungalow — had spoken to him and she alone could positively identify him. Most probably he had resumed his identity as a respectable citizen and would never even be suspected.

And if he is never even suspected, Margaret reflected, he may kill some other poor girl who trusts him. She had suppressed evidence which might have resulted in arrest . . . It was wrong to hang a man: therefore it must be wrong to procure his hanging. Reason evaporated in fantasy. (*I'll get to the prison in nice time. Listen to me, everybody! That man would be alive now, but for me. I handed him over to be hanged!*)

For a week the conflict tore her. Then she plucked up courage to take out the compact and the comb. The envelope was lying flap uppermost. She stared at it until the spell was broken. Then she picked it up and turned it over.

The address was printed, which seemed wrong somehow. It was stamped but the stamp had not been canceled. She read again the typed memo slip and observed a misalignment. It was initialed. The initials were decipherable as J. E. — presumably J. Eshelby.

"Grantham" had not received that memo by post. The unused stamp and the printed London address! It must have been "Grantham" who had intended to post the memo — to instruct a subordinate — after typing it on the portable in the bungalow. Therefore, "Grantham" was Eshelby. Or he might be only Eshelby's manager. Awkward. One could not walk up to a man and ask him if he happened to be a murderer.

By the middle of the morning she was crossing London to the East End. Blucher Street, a blind alley ending at the river embankment, had been

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a residential terrace. Half of it had been bombed and was now a car park. The surviving half consisted of three-story houses mainly used for business. Entering No. 51, she opened a door on her left, labeled *Inquiries*.

The one-time front room and dining room had been converted into one and was now a combined office and storeroom. A girl in a loud jumper was fitting the cover over a typewriter. She looked at Margaret with annoyance.

"It's five to twelve and we're shutting till Monday."

"Will you please take this note to Mr. Eshelby and say that I will wait for the answer?"

The girl grudgingly took the envelope and went upstairs with it. Inside the envelope was a half sheet on which Margaret had written her name and address in full. If Eshelby were Grantham it would be enough. If he were not, no harm would be done.

"Mr. Eshelby says will you go up, please. It's the first door you come to, top of the stairs. The front door will be shut when you come down, but it'll open on the latch. There! It's striking twelve — I'm off."

The front door was slammed, leaving hall and staircase to be illumined by the fanlight only. While Margaret moved cautiously to the staircase she recited Miss Stanmore's description: height about five foot nine, age about 30, clean-shaven, nose straight, regular features, eyes large and brown, deep voice.

She was nearly at the top of the stairs when a door opened.

"This way, Miss Whinley. I'm sorry that girl has no manners."

The voice was deep; the height was about five feet nine, which was her own; the features were regular and the eyes were brown.

"Thank you," she said as he bowed her into a well-furnished office and drew back a padded swivel chair.

Margaret was struggling to readjust her ideas. She had no doubt that this man was "Grantham" — the murderer! She had assumed that "the brand of Cain" must have some kind of literality. She had expected at least the human equivalent of the doubtful sort of dog that looks as if it might bite you.

This man looked remarkably like the shadow she had summoned on many a lonely evening at the flat. If anything, he was better-looking than she had imagined.

"Well now, Miss Whinley, will you tell me what I can do for you?"

Margaret opened her purse and took out the envelope.

"She found this in your dressing-gown pocket."

He did not ask who "she" was. He glanced at the memo, then nodded and smiled vacuously.

"It's all Greek to me, Miss Whinley. Haven't you come to the wrong address?"

"Miss Stanmore will know," answered Margaret.

She wished she had not spoken so bluntly — she blamed herself for

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tearing away the decencies. She had thumped the bluff out of him. She wished he would say something or make some sound. His lower lip was stretched, like that of a child about to howl. This was The Hunted Man of all the pamphlets. She had always thought of something tragically gallant — forgetting why the hunted man was being hunted.

"Forgive me." He was trying to build up a front. "I never guessed it could happen like this — without the police." He covered his face with his hands. "Don't worry — I won't try and bolt out at the back. I'll come with you to the police. But we don't need Miss Stanmore, blowing off her grievances. Can't we give her the slip?"

"She isn't here."

He dropped his hands and sat upright.

"You didn't bring her along? And you haven't been to the police! — they wouldn't have let you come here."

As clearly as if he had put it into words she knew he had realized that he and she were alone in that house.

She watched him slide out of his chair and edge round the corner of the table towards her. She held her head back, as if to offer her throat. But the exquisite moment of mortal fear eluded her. With reason or without, she could feel no fear of this man. Their eyes met, hers reflecting disappointment.

"You haven't enough nerve left, have you?"

"You're laughing at me." The deep voice thinned to a querulous whimper. "Anyhow, I bet you've got *someone* outside!"

"And if I hadn't and you'd murdered me, you'd have had to run away afterwards — and then you would stand no chance at all."

"What chance do I stand now?"

"I don't know. Go back to your chair and we'll see." For the first time in her life the governess-tone was effective. Here was someone who would listen to her and obey. "Why did you kill Eileen?"

"That's a funny sort of question!" He blinked. "I don't know. It began with her saying there was a kid coming along and we'd got to get married. And I said how did I know it was mine."

"That was a silly insult. You know she loved you madly."

"Madly!" he scoffed. "But the wrong kind of mad. It was fine at first. She was full of fun and games, and so was I. Just the two of us. As a matter of fact, you spoiled all that."

"When I'd never seen you and really knew nothing about you? How could I?"

"Asking me to supper. The wrong idea altogether. It started her thinking. Home and respectability, and all that. First thing I really noticed was when she started saving money. My money, I mean. Wouldn't let me spend anything on her. Doing everything on the cheap. Rather sit in the park than go to a show. Wanted us to go to cheaper hotels. I was beginning

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to get cold feet, but she wouldn't let go. I'd given her an accommodation address, and she'd keep writing and 'phoning and wiring. I thought she might snap out of it if we had a few weeks together, so I took that bungalow. You know it all now."

"No, I don't," said Margaret. "If you found her as attractive as you did, why couldn't you marry her? Have you a wife living?"

"Not me — I'm not the marrying sort. I like to put in steady work here, then have a bit of fun outside with the girls. I thought Eileen felt the same — until she let me see that the fun was only the bait. Cor! Coming home every evening to the same woman and seeing her first thing every morning — year after year! I couldn't do it, Miss Whinley. See what I mean?"

If Margaret did not see what he meant, she sensed that he was telling a truth about himself.

"And for those reasons you decided to rob her of her life?"

"I didn't *decide* anything! She started a row. You'd be surprised at the cruel things she said — a refined girl like that. Dragged in the diplomatic service — a bit of moonshine I cooked up so I could do myself justice. I'm romantic. My business is not — the way a girl looks at it. I had to shut her up, and somehow I found I'd got her by the throat. That sort of settled it. Seemed at the time as though it was a case of her life or mine. Felt I couldn't turn back once I'd started. If I'd had the sense to say to myself, 'Stop, you fool, you'll kill that girl in a minute,' I'd have stopped. Do you believe what I'm telling you?"

"I suppose I do. Eileen deliberately made you angry. You got her taunts all mixed up with the marriage you did not want, and you whipped yourself into an hysteria in which you felt compelled to kill. When you came to your senses, you were horrified."

"That's right," cried Eshelby. "Thank God I've convinced you!"

"Thank God you've convinced me," echoed Margaret, "that the whole thing is likely to happen again with the next poor girl who trusts you and then has to tell you that it's your belated duty to marry her."

"Not after what I've been through!"

"You would have escaped if you had happened to post that memo as you intended. And then you would have experienced nothing that could make you suffer. Next time, you would simply be more careful." She added, "There will be no next time."

She got up — intending, as she believed, to go to the police. On her way across the room, the floor seemed to swing gently, threatening her balance. (*No, dear, it is NOT an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. The poor wretch has to wait three Sundays, counting the days, the hours, the minutes.*)

She turned back, and the floor steadied under her feet. She went to his side of the table, towered over him hunched in his chair.

(*What these tragic invalids need is treatment, inspired by understanding. Of course, no one suggests that they should retain their full liberty.*)

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"Fear makes you wish that you had married Eileen, though you hate the idea of marriage. You now have the choice of marrying *me* or being hanged."

"Well, I'm damned!" He was startled out of his fear. "You want to marry — *me?*"

"No more than I want to hang you!" she flashed. "Try hard to understand — it's *you* who have thrust this ghastly choice on *me*. Marrying you is the only way of *not* hanging you."

He was near to gibbering with bewilderment and anxiety.

"Listen, I'll do anything! But I don't get it! Where do you come in? What've I got to do?"

"You'll have to show by your life from now on that it's wrong to hang men like you." Her answer seemed incomplete. She added, "There is, of course, no question of — mutual attraction. It will be a marriage of penance — on both sides."

"Penance?" he repeated.

The governess element in Margaret rose to its peak moment.

"Let it be clearly understood that there will be no more — 'girls' — for you. Morally, you are a backward child, in need of treatment. I shall try to make you grow up. Whether I succeed or fail, you will never be given the chance to murder anyone else — until you have murdered me."

It was theatrical and it was pretentious, but it was none the less sincere. She was dedicating her life to her principles — failing to take warning from James Eshelby's remarkable resemblance to the dream lover with whose shadow she had spent so many lonely evenings at the flat.

James Eshelby, of course, was in no position to raise objections. When he learned that Margaret intended to remain financially self-supporting, he could hardly believe his luck. Unless a fairly large photograph of himself were published in the papers and Miss Stanmore happened to see it, he was in no danger, provided Margaret kept her word. They were to be married in a month. There were worse things. She hadn't the touch of glamor that Eileen had, but she was not bad-looking, and her figure was every bit as good. She had been almost matey when discussing the four empty rooms in the house. That stuff she had handed him about not being attracted! If she hadn't fallen for him, it didn't make sense.

Margaret began the process of vacating her flat and selling her furniture. She had already resigned her job and changed her bank. James Eshelby, she decided, must not meet any of her small circle — it would be morally indecent. She had no thought of evading the police. Being wholly ignorant of police technique, she believed that the search for "Grantham" had been abandoned as hopeless. She registered as "Mrs. Eshelby" at an agency supplying temporary secretaries.

During the month she added sociability to the list of virtues essential to her task. A woman could not help a man to remodel his character by con-

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stantly glowering at him. In the middle of the first week she invited him to dinner at a Soho restaurant. He turned up well-groomed, cheerful, and attentive — a very different man from the craven to whom she had dictated the terms on which he would be allowed to live. She told him that she had enjoyed herself before she realized what she was saying.

They had as many practical plans to discuss as a normal couple and they met on most evenings. He interested her in the mechanism of his agency. He told her business yarns that were nearly as adventurous as if they had been about the diplomatic service. There were stretches of minutes which lent substance to her one-time dreams of the shadowy lover she had shared with Eileen. Afterwards, she would lie awake questioning herself. The overall answer was that it cannot be wrong to enjoy yourself while engaged in acts of self-sacrifice. So it could not be wrong to laugh at his jokes. He was very good at creating little jokes that were funny only to the two of them.

Three days before their wedding, she made a final inspection of the decorations.

"That paint comes up nicely," she approved. "And you were right about the bathroom. Everything is better than I expected."

"That's how it's going to be from now on." His tone drew her eyes to him. "I've known it for the last three days." She was silent, but she did not turn away. He came closer. "I've never called you by your name before. I'm going to, now. Listen . . ."

He had used that little tag on many previous occasions, and his timing was good. While she was being kissed, Margaret enjoyed an ecstatic vision of herself as the symbol of James Eshelby's repentance. She was his Second Chance, herself a stepping stone to — this-that-and-the-other.

They had planned to come straight home to the house in Blucher Street. After the ceremony at the registrar's, however, Margaret allowed him to whisk her off to Brighton for a weekend honeymoon.

The police, of course, had not abandoned their search for "Grantham." They were working backwards on the habits and ascertainable movements of Eileen, hoping to make a contact. Needing some further information, Inspector Curwen sought Margaret's help, arriving at her flat at a time when Margaret herself was in the train to Brighton.

Miss Whinley, the caretaker said, had left no forwarding address, but he knew where her furniture had been sold by auction. The auctioneer in turn knew only the address of the flat — she had collected her money from him in person. Later, the company that had employed her could help only with the address at which she had lived with her mother — which proved a dead end.

Margaret Whinley was no crook; but, reflected Inspector Curwen, she had bolted as a crook bolts. Why? If she had run off with a married man

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there would be no need for this elaborate cover-up. She had been unable to give him the slightest help in the matter of Grantham. She had not seen him, didn't know what his job was, nor any single thing about him. Or did she? Put it how you like, it was at least a long shot that if they could find the Whinley girl they would find the man who had murdered her best friend. Curwen was as nearly shocked as is possible for so experienced a detective.

At Brighton, Margaret was whirling herself off her feet. Eshelby was always able to abandon himself to the mood of the moment, detaching himself from his past and ignoring his future. That weekend closely approached Margaret's own conception of what a honeymoon ought to be. In the months that followed it would have been difficult to define in what way this marriage of penance differed from the ordinary marriage of a couple well pleased with one another.

The secretarial agency provided a succession of well-paid temporary jobs. They would dine out and go on to an entertainment, or spend a contented evening at home. Jim was attentive, amusing, companionable. The "ghastly choice" that had been thrust upon her was losing its ghastliness. Into the mental and emotional fog came a patch of light. She was not leading the dedicated life, as she had intended; she had married the murderer of her best friend — and was in danger of living happily ever afterwards.

A murderer was in need of treatment, the pamphlets had insisted, but they had given no definition of that magic word. Treatment, presumably, of his murderous impulse, of his morbidity, of his inability to control his passions. Jim's conduct, however, proved irreproachable. Or perhaps it only seemed so. Was she lacking in vigilance? In the working week he spent fourteen hours out of the twenty-four in her company. There were the remaining ten during which Miss Howes, his typist, was accessible. Margaret's path seemed clear.

"Jim, I want you to get rid of Miss Howes. There's nothing she does for you that I can't do better. And I'd like to help you."

"That's a most generous offer," he said, with superb self-control. "Only, I'm afraid it wouldn't work out. She knows the routine backwards."

"Then it must be a very simple routine! I'll start with you on Monday. You can begin to show me the routine over the weekend."

That, really, was all that was said on the point of sacking Miss Howes. For the first time, if only by her tone of voice, she had reminded him of the existence of Miss Stanmore.

After a meditative silence, he said, "You don't think there's been any funny business with that girl, do you? I mean — I may be a fool, Margaret — but I thought you and I were getting along all right."

"I have nothing to complain of, Jim, but I think that some decisions must rest with me."

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She saw him flush and repress a retort, but thought that the reminder would be good for him.

As his secretary and deputy, Margaret saved him time and helped his judgment. When he left the office, she kept tabs on his movements. This increased efficiency, but it made Eshelby feel like a dog on a leash.

After a month of it, he took his courage in both hands. He mentioned the name of an American company, whose representative was crossing on the *Queen Mary*.

"I thought I'd run down to Southampton tonight and meet him."

Margaret turned the pages of *The Times*.

"The *Queen Mary* is not due until seven tomorrow evening. We can go down after lunch tomorrow."

"*Wel*" He was horrified. "A man can't tote a wife along to a business talk!"

"You can explain that I'm your secretary."

"It would make him laugh! All right, the Southampton idea is off. I suppose I haven't been 'in' long enough to rate a parole."

When he had left the room, Margaret pondered the taunt, discovering a retrospective sting in its tail. Was it possible that he was feeling their marriage as a prison sentence, while she had deluded herself that they were enjoying an unexpected happiness?

She knew the answer very soon. After the Southampton incident he ceased to pursue her attention and evaded all favors. She faced the fact that he had no personal interest in her whatever. In short, for a few months she had been one of his "girls" — of whom he had now tired and had lost the power of pretending otherwise. So be it!

The existence of Miss Stanmore gave Margaret total control on all major issues. But it was altogether too formidable a weapon for everyday use. She needed something more flexible — something which contained, as it were, the possibility of graded punishment. Punishment for murdering Eileen? Hardly! Punishment for scorning Margaret? That question was not raised.

"It seems to me, Jim, that your business is little more than a collecting agency. Surely you would do better if you were to *buy* from the manufacturers, taking your discounts —"

"You're telling me! It would take two thousand pounds in hard cash to start that line, so let's pretend!"

"I could put two thousand pounds into the business, if you like."

"Good lord!" He was reproaching himself for having missed an opportunity. "Why should you? You don't like me any more."

"If you really mean that you could use the money, I'll see what a lawyer can do to help us."

The lawyer converted the business of J. Eshelby into a limited company with a capital of three thousand £1 shares, of which two-thirds were owned by Mrs. Eshelby — whose signature would henceforth be required on all checks drawn on the

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company's account. Pending dividends, each would draw a small salary from the company.

Eshelby made no comment about the articles of the company until the end of the day.

"Means you're boss of the show now, and can kick me out whenever you feel like it," he pointed out. "Not that that makes any change either of us'll notice."

"Did you want the money as a free gift?" countered Margaret. "Oh, don't be bitter and silly, Jim! It'll be fun, if you look at it in the right way. Let's go out and have a special dinner to celebrate."

"That's an *idea!*" he cried. "A better dinner than all the other dinners put together! Where'll you have yours? I'm going to have mine at the *Red Lion* — in the saloon for men only. See you later!"

Margaret watched him go without protest. It was the first time he had been out alone in the evening. His fear of her was weakening.

Within two hours he came home. His step on the stairs was not quite steady. He did not join her in the sitting room, but went to his own room and locked the door.

At breakfast he was in good spirits.

"Sorry about last night — I didn't mean it."

"I know you didn't mean it, Jim." When he smiled, she added, "That's why it's so discouraging. You give way to momentary impulses and are sorry for it afterwards. You don't remember how dangerous it is."

"A great deal in what you say," he muttered. He was not really paying attention. He did not care whether she forgave him or not. His mind was occupied with the day's work of which he began to talk excitedly.

When the office was closed for the lunch hour she went out and bought a bottle of whiskey, which cost nearly two pounds. Men of his kind, she knew, very rarely kept alcoholic drinks in the home. He thought it a good idea and bought the next, and subsequent bottles, himself. He would drink quite heavily in the evenings — without, apparently, any loss of energy and enthusiasm during the day.

His enthusiasm mystified her. Apparently she had changed his views about the limited company. The use of her capital nearly doubled the former profits. This fired his imagination, and he drove himself hard, taking full advantage of a mild boom in the trade to secure new business.

"It's piling up and up and *up!*" he chirped. "What about drawing a dividend for ourselves? I'm getting a bit short."

"We can't draw against profits until they're declared," she told him, having been well coached by her lawyer. "The accounts have to be audited. But you can have an advance on your salary."

"I don't mind what they call it as long as it's cash!" He signed for an advance. He asked for another advance in a fortnight, and Margaret made no objection. The empty whiskey bottles accumulated.

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As month followed month he continued to work industriously, and to enjoy it. In this, the third phase of their marriage, he seemed to have solved the problem of "treatment" by applying it to himself without her aid. He was regular in his habits, energetic and prudent in his work, and noticeably self-controlled. He would take small reverses and disappointments without even a swear word. In the office he left nothing to be desired. In the home he would speak politely, but he avoided her when he could. She knew why. He had turned her into the wife in his original nightmare of marriage. She remembered his words — "coming home every evening to the same woman and seeing her first thing every morning" — but she forgot they were the reason he gave for murdering Eileen.

In due course the audit showed a net profit of close to a thousand pounds for the first half year. The formal meeting of the Board was held in Eshelby's office, under the wing of Margaret's lawyer. Eshelby did not listen carefully to the proceedings. He heard Margaret talking about the company acquiring a warehouse of its own and assumed she was talking big to impress the lawyer's clerks.

"A thousand in the clear the first six months, and more to come! I told you it was piling up, didn't I?" The meeting was over, and Eshelby felt entitled to jubilate. "If-I've got it right, that's around six hundred for you and three for me. A hundred'll do me to be going on with."

"But Jim! You heard what was said. The profits are ploughed back for development. You voted for it yourself. There is no dividend."

He was too alarmed for speech. He stared at her, his jaw loose.

"And the auditor says the advances made to you must be repaid by agreed deductions from your salary."

That finished it! She had taken his business away from him, and had now found another legal trick for making him work for nothing but his keep. What was the good of his keep if he had to share it with her? Sit opposite her or trot beside her to a film, wishing she was dead. Enslaved for life.

Margaret was observing him. He was hunched in his chair, looking the way he had looked that first day when he was waiting for her to summon the police. A more virile man, she thought, would have stormed and brawled. Possibly her measures had been too drastic. She would ease things a little for him — provided he would cooperate. Say, pocket money. And perhaps a television set.

His limpness continued for the rest of the day. In the evening he barely touched his food. He was silent, answering absently when she spoke. When he went to bed, he took the whiskey bottle with him. She had small jobs which busied her for an hour before she also retired.

She was in her dressing gown, brushing her hair, when she heard his footstep in the corridor. In his house, she had always left her door unlocked — "on principle." She could rush and

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lock it now. Instead, she went on brushing her hair.

He came in without knocking. She saw in the mirror that he had changed his lounge suit for an old pullover and flannel trousers.

"Well, Jim?"

"I've figured it out." The deep voice was husky. He closed the door, came slowly towards her. She was alert but not afraid, convinced that she could dominate him. He had been drinking, but he was by no means drunk.

Their eyes met in the looking glass. His were bloodshot, but fully perceptive.

"D'you know what you're doing, Margaret? . . . Murder!"

His voice had risen in pitch. The words were meaningless, she thought — which might be a bad sign. She kept her eyes fixed on his reflection. She knew he was quick and strong. But she would not have to scuffle — only to jerk him back to his senses.

"If you want to talk about the Board meeting, which you never troubled to understand —"

"I understand you, anyway — and I know where I get off." He spoke without anger, as if stating an impersonal opinion, and continued in the same detached tone. "I was a fool to choose you instead of the cops. I don't blame you for that."

"What *do* you blame me for, Jim?"

"Murder. Malice aforethought an' all!" He seemed to lose interest in her; he began to pace the room. "I was fond of Eileen. Lost my temper and found I'd done the poor kid in. You didn't lose *your* temper. Took your time over the job — and now it's all done, bar jumping in the river."

The old pullover and flannels began to take on meaning — she had been told that suicides often take pains to avoid spoiling their clothes. Well, of course, she could jerk him out of that mood as easily as she could have jerked him out of the other.

"Figure it out, Margaret." He spoke from the doorway. Presently she heard him going downstairs. She felt certain that if she were to call him he would stop. She could exhibit concern, promise substantial concessions —

(*In those rare cases where treatment proved of no avail, the final outrage could be avoided if the subject were allowed to extinguish himself.*)

She heard the front door bang. She shielded her eyes with the curtain and looked out of the window. She looked left towards the main road — then right, which led nowhere except to the river. As once before, she looked for "the brand of Cain" — this time in her looking glass. Dismissing the childish fancy, she let her eyes rest on herself, with some complacency. Peach nylons and lace! She had always been ready to do everything she could for him, in every way . . .

By breakfast time she was ready to face the world. Toward the end of a busy morning in the office she remembered the clothes he had been wearing — which probably contained no means of identification. If the body

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were never identified, there would be complications in what was now a very flourishing concern, which she intended to develop.

At lunch time she went to the local police, who directed her to the Bureau of Missing Persons. Here her description, particularly of the clothing, was found to tally with that of a corpse picked out of the river an hour before.

Margaret herself was on the file of Missing Persons, as missing and wanted for interrogation as a witness. The sergeant put her in the waiting room, checked his memory by her photograph, then telephoned Inspector Curwen.

After some delay, Margaret was taken in a police car to the mortuary, where she identified the remains of James Eshelby. Afterward, they told her there were formalities and drove her to a building which she did not know to be Scotland Yard, so little interested had she always been in crime and criminals.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Eshelby. Why, it's Miss Whinley —"

"I was, Inspector. Fancy you remembering!"

"We met at your flat. About the murder of your friend, Eileen Revers." Inspector Curwen was almost jovial about it. "And now there's this tragic occurrence. Your husband 'found drowned.' Will you sit here? I have to ask you a lot of questions. You need not answer them if you'd rather not. Anything you tell me may be written down and used in evidence."

"Then I'll answer the worst question before you ask it," offered Margaret. "Our marriage was an unhappy one. Last night, my husband said he intended to take his life — but, of course, I did not believe him. So many people say it without meaning it."

Curwen reluctantly gave her credit for not playing the stricken widow.

"When were you married, Mrs. Eshelby?"

"Last year. July the twenty-seventh."

"That would be about five weeks after he had murdered Eileen Revers, wouldn't it?"

"What an abominable thing to say about my husband!" Margaret was not good at that kind of thing and promptly hedged. "You would not say that unless you thought you had proof."

"Quite right — though it will be some hours before we can get Miss Stanmore up to London to button it up. As soon as you made your inquiry this morning I had the fingerprints of the corpse taken. They correspond with prints found at the bungalow. Can you go on from there? Remember my warning about evidence."

"I need no warning!" snapped Margaret. "If this — awful thing — is true, I did not know it. I told you at the time that I had never even seen the man."

"I believe you," said Curwen indifferently. "Her diary confirms that you and he had never met. And it's a safe inference that Eileen herself did not know his real name, nor his home

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address, up to the last entry in her diary. Besides, we're not suggesting that you were accessory before the fact. There would have been no need for him to murder her if he'd wanted you instead — and you certainly would not have been a consenting party."

"Then what are we talking about?" faltered Margaret.

"About how you found that man when we failed. There's only one answer — Eileen Revers. When she turned up at your flat that afternoon to say she was fed up with the man and was coming back to live with you, you pumped her —"

"I pumped nothing. And she was not coming back to live with me. She was full of plans to put pressure on 'Grantham' to marry her."

"Have it your own way." Curwen opened a dossier. "This is what you said to me in your flat. He — that is, 'Grantham' — had told Eileen he was in the diplomatic service, and she had discovered it was not true." Curwen paused. "By the way, Mrs. Eshelby, what was your husband's job?"

"He was in sanitary fittings."

"Sanitary fittings," repeated Curwen. "Here's a letter written by you and enclosed in the parcel you sent to the bungalow. 'I am keeping your note about the *sanitary fittings* until we meet again . . .' Why didn't you return that note to her? You weren't buying sanitary fittings together. And she had too much on her mind for just a shopping chat."

A constructive lie was beyond Margaret's capacity.

Curwen continued: "That note was the reason why she knew he was not in the diplomatic service. A note on his business stationery that he'd left lying about in the bungalow, eh? In your possession while you were telling me you didn't know what Grantham's job was. I shall have to charge you as accessory *after* the fact."

"I acted on principle!" The governess element was coming to the rescue of her dignity. "I believe it to be wrong to hang a man, therefore I would not help to hang him."

"So you helped to drown him instead!" said Curwen. But he said it to himself . . .

EDITORS' NOTE: *Not being lawyers ourselves, we can't help wondering if Margaret Whinley, that "woman of principle," could be so charged — as an accessory after the fact — in the United States. Or, if she could, would she be found guilty on the basis of the evidence known to Inspector Curwen? We have the uneasy feeling that Mrs. "Grantham" Eshelby, née Margaret Whinley, would go her self-righteous way without penalty and with no greater loss to her stiff-necked assurance than perhaps a hard dent to her principles in the matter of capital punishment.*

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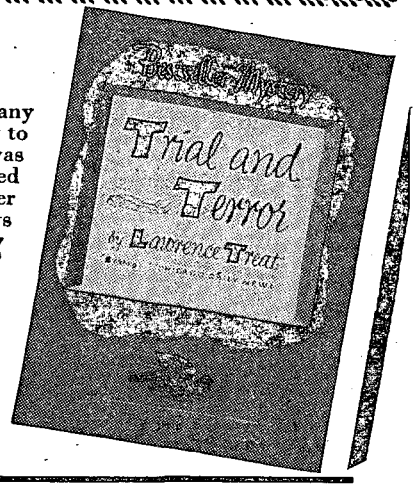

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